

Routledge Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature

CLEMENCE DANE

**FORGOTTEN FEMINIST WRITER OF
THE INTER-WAR YEARS**

Louise McDonald



Clemence Dane

This feminist investigation of the works of Clemence Dane joins the growing body of research into the relationship of female-authored texts to the ideology and cultural hegemony of the Edwardian and inter-war period. An amalgam of single-author study and thematic period analysis, through sustained cultural engagement, this book explores Dane's journalism, drama and fiction to interrogate a range of issues: inter-war women's writing, the Middlebrow, feminism, (homo) sexuality, liberal politics, domesticity, and concepts of the spinster. It examines form and a range of fictional genres: drama, bildungsroman, detective fiction, historical saga and gothic fiction. It relates back to the genre writing of comparable authors. These include Rosamond Lehmann, Vita Sackville-West, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Dorothy Strachey, Dodie Smith, Rachel Ferguson, May Sinclair, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Daphne Du Maurier, G.B. Stern, and detective writers: Dorothy L. Sayers, Agatha Christie, Gladys Mitchell, Margery Allingham and Ngaio Marsh. Offering a picture of an era, focalised through Dane and contextualised through her journalism and the work of her female peers, it argues that Dane is often markedly more radically feminist than these contemporaries. She engages with broad issues of social justice irrespective of gender and her humanity is demonstrated through her sympathetic representations of marginalised characters of both sexes. However, she most specifically evidences a gender politics consistent with the fragmented and multifarious essentialist feminism that emerged following the Great War, which esteemed 'womanly' qualities of care and mothering but simultaneously valued female autonomy, single status and professionalism. Adopting the critical paradigms of domestic modernism and women's liminality, the book will particularly focus on the trajectories of Dane's extraordinary modern heroines, who possess qualities of altruism, candour, integrity, imagination, intuition, resilience and rebelliousness. Over the course of her work, these fictional women increasingly challenge oppressive normative forms of domesticity, traversing physical thresholds to create alternative domesticities in self-defining living and working spaces.

Louise McDonald is currently Senior Lecturer in English at Newman University. Her publications include: 'Clemence Dane's Fantastical Fiction and Feminist Consciousness' in Ehland, Christoph and Wachter, Cornelia *Middlebrow and Gender 1980–1945* (2016), 'Softening Svengali: Film Transformations of *Trilby* and Cultural Change' in Cooke, Simon and Goldman, Paul *George du Maurier: Illustrator, Author, Critic* (2016) and 'From Victorian to Postmodern Negation: Enlightenment Culture in Thackeray's and Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon*' in Bloom, Abigail Burnham and Pollock, Mary Sanders *Victorian Literature and Film Adaptation* (2011). She has also contributed articles on Clemence Dane and her work to *The Literary Encyclopedia*, Baldick, Chris and Childs, Peter (eds.) *English Writing and Culture of the early Twentieth Century, 1945–Present* (2017).

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First published 2021
by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-0-367-56889-4 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-09980-2 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

For Karl, Marianne and Angelina, and in memory
of Juliet Howe



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Acknowledgements

My thanks go to my colleagues and friends at Newman University past and present, particular Helen Davies, and the Newman research committee for granting my sabbatical, especially Emma Board and Jane Allcroft. I am also grateful for the advice given to me by members of the English Department at Leicester University, particularly Victoria Stewart and also Martin Stannard, Mark Rawlinson and Philip Shaw. My thanks also go to staff at the university's Graduate Office.

I would also like to thank staff at Newman University Library, University of Leicester Library, Birmingham Central Library, Birmingham University Library, University of Bristol Theatre collection, The British Museum and associated Newspaper Library, the V & A, particularly staff working in the Theatre Performance Collections and Images Collections, the Harry Ranson Centre, the Prints & Photographs Division of the Library of Congress and the Claremont Fan Court Foundation Ltd. All efforts have been made to contact copyright holders.

More thanks are due to Gail Marshall, Nicola Humble, Angela K. Smith, David Tomlinson, Sylvia Kent, Mia Khachidze and Gillian Ide. Many thanks to Brill Rodopi for giving permission to reproduce material first published in Ehland, Christoph and Wachter, Cornelia (2016) *Middlebrow and Gender 1980–1945*. Thanks also to the editorial team at Taylor and Francis, especially Michelle Salyga and Bryony Reece.

My very special thanks go to my mother, Clive, all other family, and friends, and my late Aunt Christine and her husband Roger for taking an interest in my study, sending snippets of information about Clemence Dane and thinking of me when browsing second-hand bookshops. Most of all I would like to thank my daughter, Marianne, for advising me throughout the course of the project; my daughter, Angelina, for putting up with a mother who must have appeared to be on another planet a lot of the time; and my husband Karl for doing just about everything around the house and keeping the ship afloat. If they hadn't been so wonderful and supportive, this project would never have been completed.

x *Acknowledgements*

Thanksgiving Prayers

O LORD, we thank thee and praise thee for the life of Clemence
Dane

WE THANK THEE

For her courage, integrity and gaiety:

For the quickness and depth of her perception:

For her gift of friendship and the joy which she brought to her
friends:

For her instant response to all in need of help:

For her writing:

For her many other talents and her craftsmanship:

For her love of words, colour and form:

For her love of animals and the wonders of the earth:

For her wide knowledge and endless delight in discovery:

For her certainty in the continuity of life:

For her beauty:

And above all, for the great generosity of her heart and spirit, and
her love of that which is good.

THANKS BE TO GOD.

Amen.

From the address that Joyce Grenfell gave at the Service of Prayer and Thanksgiving for Miss Clemence Dane (Winifred Ashton), at the Royal Parish church of St Martin-in-the-fields, (Joyce Grenfell Archive, Theatre Collection, University of Bristol).

Introduction

Clemence Dane, C.B.E. (1888–1965) (born Winifred Ashton) was once a valued literary figure with an international reputation as a prolific novelist and playwright, as well as a scriptwriter, poet, editor, historian, literary critic, biographer, journalist, broadcaster, actor, one-time teacher and accomplished painter and sculptor. Her long career began with the publication of her first novel in 1917 and ended with a novella published in 1964. Among the successful screen plays which she produced for British and Hollywood studios, she won an Oscar for her original story for Alex Korda's 1946 film, *Perfect Strangers* and many of her nineteen novels and novellas were best-sellers. She wrote multiple-authored detective-story collaborations with the likes of Dorothy Sayers and Agatha Christie, and a crime novel which she co-wrote with Helen Simpson was adapted by Hitchcock into his 1930 film *Murder!* She also published a cultural history of Covent Garden, produced pageants, edited collections of letters, plays and stories, and penned regular articles for *Good Housekeeping* between 1922 and 1933, becoming the magazine's book editor between 1923 and 1933. As a consequence of her success as a journalist, she was made president of the Society of Women Journalists, a position which she held between 1939 and 1959, and in the early 1940s, she wrote and broadcast for the radio, replacing J.B. Priestley when he was taken 'off air because of his controversial stance on the war' (Gale, *Many masks* 52). This role involved a national morale-raising function which enabled her to fashion the public mood in line with her liberal way of thinking and simultaneously speak for the prevailing patriotic hegemony. It also made her a household name. In the 1950s and 1960s she created dramas for the new medium of television.

I was first introduced to her work through Maggie Gale's seminal 1996 theatre-history text, *West End Women and the London Stage*. Focussed on women's involvement as actresses, managers and dramatists in the world of twentieth-century Drama, Gale's book includes some discussion of Dane and makes claims for her status as a notable dramatist. She also dedicates three chapters to a discussion of Dane and her work: 'From Fame to Obscurity: in Search of Clemence Dane' in her co-edited text,

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Women, Theatre and Performance: New Histories, New Historographies and 'The Many Masks of Clemence Dane' in Lockhurst and Moody's *Theatre and Celebrity in Britain 1600–2000*. Gale calls attention to Dane's popularity, the proliferation of her dramatic output and the longevity of her career, a point also noted by Clive Barker who contends that along with Noel Coward and George Bernard Shaw she was the only major playwright who 'crossed the dividing lines' between the 1920s and 1930s' (32). Dane was well-acquainted with and much respected by both of these more illustrious playwrights. Shaw said about her: 'I am fortunate in seeing such a star rise before I die' (qtd. in Barrow 35); such was his high opinion of her that although a habitual 'scoffer at the Movies', he was persuaded to sell *Pygmalion* to RKO only once she had reassured him that they could be trusted to reproduce it faithfully, having already dipped her own toe into the cinematic waters and given them the rights to adapt *Bill of Divorcement*, which was done to her great satisfaction ('Shaw to sell story to movies' Parsons, L.O. 1933). As such, she had some hand in the existence of legendary film, *My Fair Lady*, a musical rework of RKO's film version of Shaw's play. Coward was one of Dane's closest friends; he dedicated his memoir, *An Autobiography: Future Indefinite*, to her, 'in memory of the war years' (*An Autobiography* Frontspiece), and on her he affectionately modelled Madame Arcati in *Blythe Spirit*.¹

Dane was popular and well-loved by all, 'friendly faced [. . .] with [. . .] smiling brown eyes' (*Oakland Tribune* Sept 4 1932), and 'easy rollicking humour' ('Personal Portraits' *The Illustrated London News* May 2 1925 798). Helen Simpson, who accredited Dane with 'making her manuscript of "Baseless Fabric" publishable' (Barrow 58),² called her 'kind' and 'beautiful' (*Adelaide Mail* Mar 19 1927), and her film-star acquaintances included Greta Garbo, Katharine Hepburn and Celia Johnson of *Brief Encounter* fame, all of whom appeared either in her plays or in cinematic adaptations of her work.³ David Niven was a particular friend, and he warmly declared that 'despite the fact that she was permanently teetering on the verge of bankruptcy, [she] was the richest human being I have ever known' (336). Although early reviews of her publications and performances were sometimes poor, she was well-regarded in some quarters of the literary establishment and in the main her work was well-received, implying her worth as writer deserving of critical attention. Virginia Woolf once regarded her as a literary competitor, writing in one of her diaries of feeling envious of press admiration of her 1919 novel, *Legend*.⁴ Eminent dramatic critic, novelist and playwright, St. John Ervine, called her 'the greatest woman playwright the English-speaking people have produced', possibly 'the greatest woman playwright that any people have produced' (qtd. in J.V.C. 'Clemence Dane: Novelist and Playwright' *Melbourne Advocate* May 3 1934). This was also the opinion of some provincial newspapers,

which variously described her as ‘the world’s best woman writer’ (‘The world’s best woman writer’ *Whitstable Times and Herne Bay Herald*. 20 April 1929), and ‘one of England’s outstanding woman writers of this age’, whose work would ‘undoubtedly survive literary moods and manners’ (*Oakland Tribune* Sept 4 1932). This assessment of the durability of her writings has proved over-optimistic, however, as apart from Gale’s attention and some literary criticism related to her controversial, best-selling lesbian-identified first novel, *Regiment of Women* (1917), her texts have generated very little scholarship since her death, and her creative legacy has been largely overlooked. Gale makes a very valid point when she writes ‘it is [. . .] very odd that she figures so little in twentieth-century [. . .] history’ (‘Many Masks’ 48).

Dane has been described as a ‘radical female scriptwriter’ (Harper 12); one inter-war journalist called her a woman who ‘is (or at least has been) an enthusiastic political feminist’ (Dark ‘Little Portraits’ *John ‘O Weekly* Oct 28 1922), and another self-confessed ‘feminist’ reporter referred to her as the ‘staunchest of feminist fighters’ (*Auckland Star* Feb 26 1927). Gale particularly notes her reputation with the press as ‘one of the most notorious feminists of her generation’ (‘Many Masks’ 49) and reading about her in Gale’s work, the combination of her celebrity, invisibility and woman-centred creative focus intrigued me. I wanted to discover more about the as-yet uncharted work of this vanished feminist figure, who in her own time was recognised as ‘a woman who writes for her own sex, whom she thoroughly understands’, and who was noted for her ‘brilliant analyses of social conditions [and] ‘words . . . of wisdom and understanding’ (ibid.), on gender-related issues in particular (‘A woman’s woman’ *Kalgoorlie Westralian Worker*. Oct 10 1924). Her writings, it seemed, engaged a wide female readership, reflected its anxieties and preoccupations, and perhaps played a part in the shaping of the consciousness of modern womanhood. Studying her work, I was struck by her unequivocal commitment to female empowerment, her feminist conviction that developed over the course of her career and her liberal representations of wider social and political issues current in her times. Aiming to extend the scope of Gale’s examination of a selection of her drama, I thus embarked upon a first major broad-based chronological literary and cultural analysis of her inter-war oeuvre (1917–1938),⁵ encompassing her journalism, drama and prose fiction. Her work was not always well-received, and my endeavour to rectify a significant literary critical omission by revisiting her writings is not primarily or necessarily undertaken to re-establish her literary kudos, extol the literary merits of her writing or address matters of literary form. Places where she issued ‘modernist’ challenges to traditional modes of writing or adapted them to suit her purposes are flagged up but my primary focus is Dane’s cultural importance, and my cultural studies based approach to her work involves exploring its relationship to the specific political, social and cultural contexts in

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which she was writing. I position her works within a feminist tradition, with her feminist credentials illuminated through an extensive scrutiny of the gender politics of her fiction. This then is a contextual study which aims to further, through the lens of Dane's work, an understanding of the nature of inter-war feminism and map it onto attitudes towards and debates about feminism which took place within female-authored middlebrow discourse during this period. I intend my interpretations of Dane's writings to contribute to the growing body of research into the middlebrow, to provide a fuller and more nuanced picture of the relationship of inter-war cultural ideology and hegemony to the politics of female-authored middlebrow fiction, in particular the ways in which it addressed the social and cultural meanings of modern womanhood and key issues and anxieties for women in a changing gender political landscape. This entails identifying connections between the gender politics of Dane's narratives and the treatment of women's issues in works by other female writers of the modern middlebrow, many of whom, with their varying levels of commitment to liberal and feminist positions, have recently begun to be reconsidered by literary historians working in cultural and feminist studies, as worthy of study and central to an emerging female literary canon.

Dane's work reveals her cautiously enthusiastic modernity, responding in a time of cultural upheaval in gender relations and gender power to the opening up of professions to women which shattered the Victorian ideal of womanhood as the 'Angel in the House'. She creates positive models of the 'modern woman', an emblematic and contested figure during the inter-war years. Her modern but initially ingenuous heroines exemplify exceptionalism, altruism, candour, integrity, imagination, intuition, resilience and rebelliousness. Combining elements of Victorian virtue with modern feminist outlooks, they are the modern descendants of the heroines of female-authored Victorian literature and the forerunners of the exceptional women who have come to feature in post-feminist film and TV period dramas. Dane's work also offers up feminist challenges to normative fiction by dismantling traditional narrative patterns which develop through 'resolutions and emphasis on domesticity and on maintaining a heteronormative order' (Hoffman 2). *Regiment of Women* and *Legend* (1919) equivocate in this respect but her later fiction adopts a more radical gender philosophy through a narrative process which charts the main female protagonist's defiance of patriarchal expectations of her conduct and domestic role, and her transcendence into a feminist identity, ending with an alternative closure which eschews the normative separate sphere marriage plot. Her fiction establishes a new world order with women at the helm and men, in need of emotional rescue and regarded with pity and understanding often mixed with faint contempt, either sympathetically accommodated, managed and protected by their wives or rejected completely.

My central focus is the identification of liberal feminism operating in Dane's work, but also crucial to my study is the premise that feminist consciousness necessarily goes hand in hand with a commitment to social justice, that, as Maroula Joannou points out, 'a text cannot be considered fully feminist if its treatment of any of the key factors of gender, nation, sexuality, sexual orientation, race and class is seriously open to question' (*Ladies* 27). Gauging Dane's perspectives on the wider feminist-affiliated issues which Joannou identifies, I explore her concern with broad social questions, which is clearly visible in her journalism and fiction through liberal attitudes to working women, spinsters and divorcees, mandates to reform education, antipathy towards eugenism, and positive and sympathetic depictions of characters marginalised for their sexuality or race. Many of her main protagonists come from deviant categories: itinerant actors, impoverished actresses, painters, androgynous women, spinsters, divorcees, gypsies and psychics, and her narratives reposition 'othered' subjects from the peripheral places they tend to inhabit in normative texts to the centre. Mutually enriching relationships between strong but alienated women and racial and social outsiders are also in evidence and working-class men and women, gypsies, Jews, 'witches', Euro-Asians, 'mad' women, lesbians and male homosexuals are represented with dignity and affirmation. Her writing is often more radical in this respect than that of her middlebrow contemporaries.

Given that a writer's work comprises 'the meeting of three histories: the life of the individual, the cultural life of the surrounding society, and the tradition of the chosen art' (Doody qtd. in Horner and Zlosnik 2), my exploration considers the ways in which Dane's work was shaped by her life experiences, her relationship with the literary middlebrow and the culture in which she was writing. Media interviews with Dane are useful to this end, as is *Winifred: the Life of Clemence Dane* (1988), an unpublished biography by playwright Kenneth Barrow. Barrow compiled this from interviews with Dane's surviving 'partner', Olwen Bowen-Davies, who died before the book was completed – and never got to tell Barrow Dane's 'the Garbo story' – (Barrow ii) and two of Dane's diaries, which have since been lost.⁶ Although Barrow's biography is a useful source, it cannot be fully relied upon for authenticity, however. Coloured by Barrow's personal admiration of Dane, it is also over-dependent on the recollections of Bowen-Davies, who, as he readily admits, was guarded and protective about the details of Dane's life. Given the fallibility and paucity of the autobiographical material, I look to Dane's personal identity revealed in her essays, in order to map her amiable but political persona revealed therein onto her novels and short stories and to note how her public voice translates into a benevolent, tolerant and socially-conscious narrative perspective. My examination of Dane's essays and Barrow's manuscript is augmented by an exploration of the, albeit limited, number of literary-critical sources which

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discuss her work, principally by drama critics Gale, Rebecca Cameron and Rebecca D'Monté,⁷ and by lesbian critics of *Regiment of Women*. It is also supported by reference to cultural theories which illuminate Dane's relationship with hegemonic gender positions. Although these include historical and social hypotheses formulated by Michel Foucault, early-twentieth century concepts of Dynamic Psychology, and Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, predominant attention is here given to feminist approaches, liberal feminism, traced back to Woolf, and psychoanalytic approaches which focus on gender and sexuality. These comprise Simone de Beauvoir's discussion of how patriarchal power structures 'other' women and engender their romantic pathology, dependency and self-loathing, Julia Kristeva's identification of semiotic jouissance, or moments of rebellious eruption and spillage out within women's psychic lives, and Judith Butler's performative theory relating to the instability and fluidity of sexual identity and the heteronormative pressures which compel women to repudiate innate homosexual identities and perform gender-normative masquerades. Other contemporary feminist critical paradigms are employed. Given that Dane's texts are self-consciously influenced by Victorian women's literature, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination* by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, which points to the symbolic implications of madness, mirrors and doubling in Victorian women's writing, is particularly pertinent. To illuminate Dane's lesbian writing, Terry Castle's theory of lesbian 'ghosting', outlined in her book, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* is also applied. Castle argues that spectres of the haunted or haunting culturally invisible lesbian are widely deployed in women's homosexual fiction in a structural pattern which works variously: to ratify, disrupt, deconstruct, condemn or elegise the heterosexual script.

It is important too to be cognisant with feminist scholarship which addresses the relationship between the female middlebrow and social concerns of the inter-war period, especially *Forever England: Literature, Femininity and Conservatism between the Wars* by Alison Light, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel 1920s-1950s* by Nicola Humble and 'Ladies, Please Don't Smash These Windows': *Women's Writing, Feminist Consciousness and Social Change 1918-38* by Joannou. Critical studies which identify literary sub-structures within the broad framework of the female middlebrow also particularly shape my analysis. In *Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel*, Jane Eldridge Miller refers to defiant pre-war texts resembling Dane's which affirm 'women outside the traditional narratives of courtship and marriage [. . .] adolescent girls, young career women, spinsters, widows, and other women whose lives did not fit neatly into the social patterns privileged by the nineteenth-century novel' (86). She describes how these

'narratives of rebellion 'are bent on disappointing reader's expectations of romantic endings in order to show the discrepancies between traditional narratives and the actual lives of modern women (ibid.). In *Women in Transit through Literary Liminal Spaces*, Teresa Gómez Reus and Terry Gifford provide an extended analysis of the ways in which tropes of space and place as 'a tangible transitional terrain' and time as 'a state of transition' can be seen to operate in the inter-war middlebrow (3). They refer specifically to Philip Wegner who calls mobility in the lives of female protagonists, 'a *force* that [. . .] influences, directs and delimits possibilities of actions and ways of being in the world' (qtd. in Gómez Reus and Gifford 4) and they point to the 'subversive and creative potential of the liminal' to contest received gender-power structures and mark increasing emancipations for women in the early twentieth century, marking the beginnings of transits from domestic to commercial environments in a bid to achieve self-determination and identity growth. Identifying pivotal thresholds where boundaries dissolve, to facilitate 'unexpected moments of access into forbidden territories' or even more permanent ingresses into public domains (Gómez Reus and Usandizaga qtd. in Gómez Reus and Gifford 3), they attend critically to the ways in which literature can reveal 'the manifold opportunities and challenges, the rewards as well as the risks, that being "in transit" may have entailed for women in a period of social and artistic transition' (Gómez Reus and Gifford 3–4). My investigation of Dane's work notes how her imaginative treatment of permeable space posits just this relationship between the private and public world, how border crossings or 'in-between space' (5) enable her women protagonists to transcend stagnation and peril, whose quests for new identities are successful. They undergo a generic 'tripartite process' (van Gennep qtd in Gómez Reus and Gifford 5). The first of three phases entails 'the detachment of the individual [. . .] from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural conditions' (Turner qtd. in Gómez Reus and Gifford 5), in the next transitional stage the 'subject crosses a threshold and enters an unknown realm in order to be tested' and having reached a final locus in which 'the passage has been consummated [. . .] the ritual subject [. . .] now has to re-enter society, hopefully after having come through the trial successfully' (Gómez Reus and Gifford 6). With a dissimilitude to many other female-authored texts in this period which 'locate all female experience in the domestic world' (Parsons 40), Dane's fiction desists from maneuvering her journeying heroines back into the traditional Victorian home and this situates her work on the enlightened end of the continuum of what Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei term domestic modernist fiction in their 2006 book, *Domestic Modernism, the Interwar Novel, and EH Young*. According respectability and modernist status to the female middlebrow, this text offers a useful framework for discussions of women's invariably home-centred inter-war novels, cataloguing a generic terrain which ranges from literary realism to the

monstrous and rebellious and includes genres embraced by Dane and her comparable contemporaries which are discussed in this work: 'drawing-room comedy (Dodie Smith, Stella Gibbons), golden age detective novel of manners (Agatha Christie, Ngaio Marsh, Dorothy Sayers) [. . .] and popular saga' (Briganti and Mezei 18). Dane's work can be clearly situated within the rebellious sub-genre of alternative domestic modernism, a form wherein 'the domestic [is] perpetually invoked in order to be denied' (Reed, qtd. in Briganti and Mezei 33), which challenges the stifling patriarchal elements of the traditional home and radicalises women's living arrangements. As the feminist impulses of Dane's work evolve, patriarchal domestic arrangements are rejected, female domestic space is radicalised, masculine authority contested, and a discourse of alternative domesticity uncovered. Her modern women protagonists traverse physical thresholds to reach new self-defining living and working spaces; they increasingly challenge oppressive normative forms of domesticity and either bring domestic space and its occupants under their control or reject it for vocational habitations. In novels written by her contemporaries, on the other hand, with the exception of rare texts situated at a radical point on the political spectrum, protagonists end their journeys back within the patriarchal home.

Mezei and Briganti contend that women writers who had the greatest 'trouble with patriarchy' (Bridget Fowler qtd in Briganti and Mezei 8) and were most likely to create for themselves 'alternative domesticities', often 'independent living or celibacy or the renunciation of domestic comfort' (Briganti and Mezei 8), were those with 'lesbian attachments' who on account of their sexuality were most likely to be 'understanding of the family . . . at odds with the contemporary nostalgia for the patriarchal past' (ibid.). As a homosexual-identified woman, Dane lived alternative domestic modernism even more than she wrote it. Despite her position within the respectable middlebrow and her middle-class upbringing – she was the daughter of a commission agent, brought up in an expensive London suburb and privately educated – she lacked personal wealth, took to writing to make her living and her version of bourgeois living: 'domesticity, privacy, comfort, the concept of home and of the family' (John Luckacs, qtd. in Briganti and Mezei 23) was markedly bohemian in essence. In the 1910s, before becoming a writer, she embarked upon a career in acting when as one would-be actress testified, it was popularly felt that 'only evil girls went on the stage' (Jackson 122), and changing her name to Diana Cortis to avoid (family) recriminations, she initially earned just £1 a week, was often 'stranded without a bed' for the night (*Daily Herald* Nov 23 1929), and lived predominantly in 'fit-ups and touring companies, landlady's lodgings and down-at-heels' (Dane, qtd. in Barrow 95). Although she was briefly engaged for a time, she never married, and from the 1920s onwards, she lived with two successive female cohabitants, who she referred to as her secretaries. Income from her

writing enabled her to buy a rambling old country house complete with farmland in Axminster in Devon, where she lived quietly, but following a decidedly more sociable time in America during the period of her Hollywood success in the mid-1930s, her domestic life underwent something of a transformation when her introverted existence was exchanged for lively friendships with an alternative family of 'sexually controversial celebrities' (Gale, 'Many Masks' 52) at an unusual London home, a long-time rented first floor flat, which for many years was accessible only through a flower shop. It was located in Tavistock Street in the heart of the dirty and noisy fruit market and theatrical community of Covent Garden, which at the time was not a desirable residential area. Although described by a journalist as 'a light cheery apartment, with a glowing electric grate, a grand piano, vases of Autumn flowers' (*Oakland Tribune* Sept 4 1932), it had likely been cleaned up for the interview as it was generally splattered with clay and paint, befitting its status as the centre of an eccentric salon culture. The affiliates of this literary and theatrical coterie⁸ were thespians, artists and writers who amused themselves in her flat drinking cocktails, playing the piano and reciting poetry, and her commitment and generosity to her friendship family was such that she became relatively impoverished over the course of her life, accruing few middle-class accoutrements, possessions or savings, ultimately dividing her time in later life between Tavistock Street and a basic gypsy caravan in a field in Sussex, and leaving only a modest estate upon her death. Her lively and alternative world reflected the radical spirit of domestic modernism, and her personal bohemian dwelling arrangements are reflected in the various evasions of traditional domesticity practised by the key female protagonists in her novels, whose lives are a far cry from the steady existence of protagonists featured in most domestic novels, who employed 'housekeeping, cooking, cleaning, decorating [. . .] to create artistic order out of the disorder of living' (Briganti and Mezei 6).

Within her coterie, she was one of only a small group of women in Noel Coward's alternative predominantly homosexual 'family heart' of 'like-minded souls' (Castle, *Noel Coward* 101) that exemplified the 'cultural bond between 1920s gay men and lesbians' (25). The group comprised 'lesbian-identified' actresses, Katherine Cornell and Mary Martin (24), and illustrious homosexuals: actor and songwriter Ivor Novello, theatre producer Binkie Beaumont, actor Marius Goring,⁹ composer Richard Addinsell and Coward himself. Such was Coward's admiration of Dane and her work that during the Second World War, he sought to sooth the pre-performance nerves which plagued him while he was preparing to embark upon a tour to entertain troops in the Middle East by reciting her poem 'Trafalgar Day' at the sea port where he was staying, 'defiantly to the sea gulls' (Coward 244). He later culminated a week of concerts for the navy in Plymouth by orating 'Plymouth', a poem which Dane wrote to honour the bravery of the people of that town who danced every night on

the Hoe during the most intensive period of air raid attacks. Her patriotic poetry inspired another homosexual actor, Kenneth Williams, of *Carry On* film fame. One of Williams' most 'greatly loved' possessions was a vinyl recording of Coward reading her 'The Welcoming Land' (Williams qtd. in Merriman vii).¹⁰ Speaking of the plight and relief of a refugee arriving at an English port, this poem epitomises Dane's hegemonic faith in English liberal tolerance as the antithesis of the Nazi ideology which threatened it.¹¹ Coward and Williams were evidently both moved by its focus on 'the hunted people who fled from persecution to this wise island' (ibid.) and the resonance for them of the poem and Dane's other work perhaps signifies the complex relationship with dominant ideology which they all had in common. It is possible that they responded to Dane's liberal ideology, her sense of gratitude to a country where, in spite of her own divergence from hetero-normative womanly behaviour, her career had flourished and she was able to enjoy a bohemian life. Although the practice of homosexual acts was illegal in Britain until 1967, and Williams was, possibly because of this, deeply sexually repressed and never 'out', the poem's perspective was perhaps encouraging for the eccentric homosexual theatre community in which Coward and Williams were accepted without prejudice and in which they prospered. Indeed, in much of Dane's work, the theatre world is as much the locus for tolerations of alternative sexualities as it is for women's ambition. Many of Dane's non-thespian friends, mainly middlebrow novelists encountered mostly following the First World War and in the early 1920s before her theatrical connections became established, were also homosexual. These included Hugh Walpole, Radclyffe and Violet Trefusis, to whom Dane was a 'major confidante and a considerable support' (Hamer 86) during the time of her affair with Vita Sackville-West, another of her 'sexually controversial' friends (Gale 'Many Masks' 50). Others among her acquaintance were not sexually controversial but racially 'other', including Parisian fashion house director, Ginette Spanier, just a shop girl when they first met (Barrow 57), who she referred to as 'my friend, half French and half English, and a Jewess' (qtd. in Barrow 113). Her author friend G.B. Stern was both Jewish and feminist, and other friends were firmly feminist, such as Helen Simpson, one-time candidate for liberal M.P., Marie Belloc-Lowndes, one of many writers who looked to her for advice on their work-in-progress and through whom she was to meet Enid Bagnold and Rebecca West, and May Sinclair. Her friendship with Shaw, a socialist and pro-feminist, connected her to the previous generation of literary outsiders.

Given her early reputation as a feminist and her ambiguous sexuality, it is perhaps surprising that Dane became a respectable middlebrow icon in the 1930s and beyond. This can be attributed to the success with which she kept her private life from the public gaze and engaged in a series of self-configurations over the course of her career, transforming

herself from rebellious Edwardian feminist to mildly eccentric and ebullient figure of the literary and media establishment. She adapted her self-image to correspond with changes in normative ideology, fashioning herself as the voice of common sense in her journalism, and making herself accepted as a bohemian character with a paradoxically old-fashioned social manner. This extended to her writing style, which is dated compared to that of some of her contemporaries. Yet although there is some truth in an observation made by Katherine Cornell, that ‘she is not the ultra-modern, strongly opinionated unconventional person you might believe. In fact, she’s rather, dare I say it, Victorian’ (qtd. in Barrow 37), and she was ‘ever the Victorian [and] wore full-length dresses up to the day she died’ (Barrow foreword), her *fin-de-siècle* pose did not signify an endorsement of traditional gender roles. Her old-fashioned attire belied a malleable gender identity which accommodated her masculine status, and she fused bohemianism with determination, tenacity, versatility and intensely hard-working professionalism. As actress Fabia Drake observed, she ‘had a very masculine mind – masculine in that she always took the lead; she championed her own causes’ (qtd. in Barrow 32–33). Describing herself as a ‘business woman’ (Dane, qtd. in Barrow 68), she demanded creative control over her work and was actively involved with the Society of Authors, an ‘authors’ pressure group’ (Baldick 20) which bargained hard with publishers’ associations to secure deals related to copyright and royalties.

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This study commences with a chapter on how Dane’s voice and perspectives were communicated through her non-fictional essays and newspaper articles and how she responded to the literary, aesthetic, political and cultural arena which shaped the form, ethos and critical reception of her fiction. It begins by contending that she can be located within the middlebrow with which she strongly identified and that her complete disappearance from literary discourse is due partly to the canonisation process throughout the second half of the twentieth century which resisted the inclusion of non-modernist middlebrow texts, particularly by female authors. It continues with a discussion of the ways in which her essays and media texts illuminate her gender politics, which were determined by the somewhat splintered and often contradictory modes of inter-war feminism that emerged following the First World War. By veering between a degree of compliance to patriarchal strictures and ownership of radical positions that would be broadly recognised as feminist today, this is likely to puzzle twenty-first-century critics used to a post-feminist ideology which may seem more confident, unified and consistent. The chapter closes with a discussion of how her non-fictional writings indicate her broadly liberal values and perspectives on contemporary social issues outside of the topic of gender: her strong opposition to capital

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punishment and her antipathy to conservative internationalist and anti-militarist standpoints, which aligned her with PEN¹² and the League of Nations and generated her open and vehement support of Woodrow Wilson's liberal stance towards post-war Germany. These radical political positions shaped two of her most openly counter-cultural texts: a 1928 stage play, *Adam's Opera*, and a 1920s' short story, 'The Valiant Little Tailor'.

Succeeding chapters turn to Dane's drama and prose fiction, unearthing her feminist messages and socially-conscious agendas and I argue that Light's definition of the inter-war female middlebrow writer as ultimately conservative, inclined to defend the status quo and resist social reform, cannot be justly applied to Dane given the modern, confident, fully formed feminist standpoint of her inter-war texts. Chapter two focuses on representations of female modernity and women's liminality in her plays, which were located in both historical and modern contexts. Her productions can be mapped onto the wide terrain of inter-war women's drama and compared with the outputs written by her contemporaries, Dodie Smith, G.B. Stern and Rachel Ferguson, whose careers on the inter-war London stage survived as long as Dane's, spanning 1921 to 1936 and extending beyond the Second World War (Gale West 200–21). Her problem plays, *Bill of Divorcement*, *The Way Things Happen* (1924), and *Mariners*, (1927), and comedy, *Moonlight is Silver* (1934), all set in contemporary England, celebrate the modernisation of womanhood through feisty and flexible protagonists, determined to avoid domestic bondage but with ambitions tempered by their commitment to support their families, often economically. Historical tragedies, *Granite* (1924), set in a brutal nineteenth-century context and *Naboth's Vineyard* (1925) and *Herod and Mariamne* (1938), both revisionist versions of bleakly misogynist biblical narratives, feature scenes of female resistance against harsh patriarchal regimes and are perhaps intended to urge modern female audiences to hold fast to inter-war feminist momentum and keep from slipping back into the masculine-dominated past. The 1921 historical bio-drama, *Will Shakespeare*, re-imagines Queen Elizabeth I and her lady-in-waiting, Mary Fitton, as feminist figures, and the Brontë bio-pic, *Wild Decembers* (1932), buoys up the ambition and achievements of the Brontë sisters. Dramatic heroines, modern and historical, are drawn in marked contrast to effete, often psychologically-damaged secondary male characters who are represented as variously brutal or needy, according to the time frame of the play.

Chapter three examines Dane's early, loosely autobiographical novels, *Regiment of Women*, *First the Blade* (1918) and *Legend* (1919), which interrogate the pre-war social forces that determine and compromise the identities of their female protagonists but differ in the degree to which they rebel against conformity to patriarchal ideology and narrative structures associated with the realist novel. Within a realist plot, *Regiment of*

Women, set in a girls' boarding school, debates marriage and spinsterhood in a dramatisation of a doomed lesbian relationship, and argues for educational reforms to benefit girls. *Legend*, the story of the life and death of a famous young novelist, is less attentive to plot, more modernist in construction, and contains a buried narrative which encrypts the heroine's secret lesbian desire for an ambitious female literary critic who exerts a Svengalian influence over her in order to promote her own career. *First the Blade* writes back to *Regiment of Women* and *Legend*: firmly rejecting the models of femininity and marriage which these novels rather unconvincingly promote, the heroine develops the confidence to challenge her inadequate male lover, ultimately choosing to remain single rather than compromise her principles, freedom and identity. These three texts are explored in relation to thematically comparable texts by other inter-war writers: Rosamond Lehmann's 1927 novel, *Dusty Answer*, Ivy Compton-Burnett's *More Women than Men* (1934) and *Challenge* by Vita Sackville-West (1924). Like Dane's first novels, these texts centralise single-women protagonists with imaginative, often artistic dispositions, and pursue the psychological effects on women of inadequate or absent mothers. Parallels between these and Dane's novels are also visible in unresolved tensions between heterosexual and lesbian love, struggles to reconcile modern (academic) womanhood with pre-war modes of femininity, and the significance of the natural world to constructions of healthy female identities.

As Humble notes, the 'flexible generic boundaries' of the middlebrow 'allowed it to explore new gender and sexual identities which were otherwise perceived as dangerously disruptive of social values' (5) and although sometimes hindered by the conventions and expectations of the specific narrative structures intrinsic to the generic forms in which she was writing, Dane accordingly adapted her writing forms to the changing demands of the middlebrow market in the spirit of New Women writers who have been noted elsewhere for having 'deliberately used popular modes of writing to reach a broad spectrum of readers' (Heilmann, qtd. in Young 41). A chronological reading of her fiction reveals a series of genre shifts and she experimented with different generic forms according to their popularity at a particular given time. Her Edwardian novels are semi-autobiographical coming-of-age texts, or bildungsromanes, in the 1920s when the form became au courant she wrote the literary fantastic in short stories *The Lover*, (1924), *Spinsters' Rest* (1926) and *The Babyons* (1927), a novel which hybridised gothic writing with the historical family chronicle or saga, another emerging popular genre of the time. She also authored one pure saga novel, *Broome Stages* (1931). These opened up feminist possibilities to the same or greater degree than the middlebrow works with which they are compared in this study: 'The Villa Desiree' (1926), a ghost story by May Sinclair, *Lolly Willows* (1926), a tale of witchcraft by Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Rebecca* (1938), a Gothic romance by Daphne

Du Maurier, and *The Rakonitz Chronicles* (1930), a saga centring on a nineteenth and early-twentieth-century European Jewish dynasty, written by G.B. Stern. While she created heroines in her bildungsromanes who struggle to negotiate comfortable identities and achieve limited success in this respect, Chapter four demonstrates how her genre texts and genre hybrids chart increased possibilities in the inter-war period for creative fulfilment for women and reposition rebellious women outside of the 'pre-war language of romance' (Light 67) and the world of heteronormative relationships, marriage and motherhood altogether. Alternative domestic novels, houses and their environs are key tropes which configure women's transition from confinement to liberation. Dane's Edwardian heroines gravitate to the countryside to counter their domestic and urban constrictions but little independence comes of this and their worlds are ultimately reductively patriarchal. The open spaces of her genre narratives, on the other hand, provide new avenues for women. The cultivated garden in middlebrow fiction is often represented as a place of constriction, a domesticated extension of the home (Downing 166) but in Dane's later texts, gardens, grounds, and the land on the periphery of patriarchal country estates operate as markers of refuge and independence, providing troubled women with sanctuary. Gothic and fantasy confer liberation by dramatically reconfiguring time and space, creating other-worldly and consequently freer domestic arrangements for her female protagonists. Gardens and other outdoor spaces deliver spiritual, often supernatural experiences which enable them to triumph over their modern anxieties and oppressions. In *The Lover*, wandering the night-time garden with a ghostly lover liberates the heroine from domestic isolation, and enables her to control her indifferent and unfaithful husband. 'Spinster's Rest' challenges the man-hungry spinster stereotype, breaking its heroine away from the real-world house to an outdoor feminine, utopian-fantasy space, which provides her with the magical gift of a child that frees her from her biological obligation to find a husband. In *Lady Babyon*, the last text in the multi-volume *The Babyons*, the central protagonist gardens her way to achieving the emotional strength to withstand her husband's indifference and control the ghosts which haunt the patriarchal country house and eventually cause his death. She consequently positively embraces widowhood and when the First World War breaks out she uses her power as the new property owner to transcend the boundaries between private and public space and re-invent the house as a military hospital. The coercive life of the big house gradually disappears in Dane's novels as, over the course of her work, women pass through the garden gate never to return to constraining domestic places marked by patriarchal violence. Permanently foregoing the limited attractions of femininity, they construct working identities instead. Her sagas shift between contemporary settings and historical contexts in order to compare and contrast the cultural oppressions experienced by women in the patriarchal past with

the opportunities which are arguably available in the present. Hence, in the second volume of *The Babyons, Midsummer Men*, the heroine finds permanent sanctuary among the gypsy community, in the sequel, *Creeping Jenny*, her granddaughter gains economic mastery over her profligate husband through successful management of their farm land which she transforms into a commercially viable female home/work domain, and in *Broome Stages*, her female protagonists venture into and become fully established within the urban metropolitan context of the theatre, as actors and actor-managers. The theatre was the working environment in which Dane enjoyed considerable success and is a fitting literary model for women's independence.

In the 1930s, Dane embarked on detective fiction during what has since become known as its 'golden age'. As I argue in Chapter five, writing a three-part crime trilogy in collaboration with Helen Simpson and contributing chapters to the multi-authored novel, *The Scoop* (1931), she succeeded in making more feminist transformations to 'golden age' formulations than her more illustrious contemporaries, Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham and Ngaio Marsh and less famous crime writer, Gladys Mitchell. While her contemporaries unequivocally venerate their technically brilliant principal male detectives, she resists generic pressures to deify her own sleuth and her women-centred plots also provide a counterpoint to the sterile masculinist technical ingenuity for which the 'golden age' was renowned. She dismantles the rigid patriarchal structures reinforced by the genre's conservative inter-war ideology; investigative plotlines are eclipsed by foregrounded narratives of strong female characters and focussed egalitarian viewpoints, and permeable female-occupied public spaces are created in commerce, the arts and mass media, with her heroines succeeding as actresses, journalists and managing directors of London publishing companies. Liminality is a vital component of their modern lives and they manage the transition between home and public space with minimum trouble. One heroine traverses the boundary into the masculine terrain of investigative journalism with all the mobility, danger and adventure this entails. Others enjoy the emancipations of walking the streets of London; one meanders the city in her leisure time; the other walks the same streets more purposefully as befits her investigative role. Some heroines support their less employable husbands and become the dominant partners in their relationships and some create relaxed and informal spaces at work which abolish normative demarcations between home and office, transforming traditional patriarchal power dynamics in the working environment with their distinctively instinctive and compassionate brand of feminism. Uniting career aspirations with a sensitivity to the needs of others, fully embracing the modern world while intuitively connecting with other people and keeping in sight the feminine values of the preceding Victorian generation, they embody Dane's ideals.

Between the hesitant feminism of her First World War novels and her 1930s output, an increasingly consistent, crystallised and overt

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feminist perspective evolves in Dane's work, going a long way to close the gap between 'the meaning prevalent at the historical moment of production and . . . present-day understandings of gendered experience' (Joannou1).

Notes

1. *Blythe Spirit* is currently enjoying somewhat of a revival, with Arcati a coveted part for respected actresses, including Jennifer Saunders, who played her at the Duke of York's theatre and Dame Judy Dench in a film version of the play, both in 2020. In effect, Dench plays Dane!
2. Dane and Simpson met when Charles Evans asked Dane to read through the type-script of Simpson's *The Baseless Fabric* (1925). The correspondence between them which ensued led to their becoming 'firm friends' (Barrow 58).
3. Dane wrote the screenplay for a highly successful 1935 David O. Selznick production of *Anna Karenina* starring Greta Garbo and directed by Clarence Brown, and Katharine Hepburn led the cast in a 1932 film version of *Bill of Divorcement*, also produced by Selznick and directed by George Cukor. Celia Johnson was the main protagonist in a 1946 theatre production of Dane's war-time play *Call Home the Heart*. ('Clemence Dane thinks audience were "angels"' *Derby Daily Telegraph*. 30 Oct., 1946, p. 3).
4. Following a good review of the novel by the *Times Literary Supplement*, Woolf recorded how the success of other writers exacerbated her tendency to self-doubt, and that she was 'pained to read praise of *Legend*, a book by Clemence Dane' (Woolf Diary 315).
5. Due to constraints of time and space, some, but not many, plays and short stories have been omitted as the subjects of my critical investigation.
6. According to Barrow she was an intermittent diarist who started a journal every new year but quickly abandoned it.
7. For a full discussion of their interpretation of Dane's work, see Chapter two.
8. Among the celebrities who frequented her Covent Garden flat were: Sybil Thorndike, Alexander Korda, Lynne Fontanne and her husband, Alfred Lunt, Lilian Braithwaite and her daughter, Joyce Carey, Douglas and Mary Fairbanks, Joyce Grenfell (who was to deliver the eulogy at Dane's funeral), Gladys Calthrop and David Niven.
9. Goring, best known for his starring role in *Red Shoes* (1948), appeared as the lead actor in her 1942 radio play commemorating the First World War, 'The Unknown Soldier' ('Radio programmes' *Derby Daily Telegraph* Nov 11 1942). It was he who suggested to Barrow that he write her biography, during their conversation at an exhibition of her artwork which Goring arranged as a tribute to her in 1985. His bequest of his collection of Dane-related media material, letters and her writing drafts comprises the Clemence Dane archive, curated at the V and A.
10. Both of these poems were eventually published in a 1965 collection entitled 'Trafalgar Day'.
11. 'Welcoming land' contains the lines:
Then came exiles who fled from death
Hunted Huguenots, Jews from Spain
To the wise island, drew sobbing breath,
The easy air and smelled the May,
Sweet as a kiss on a summer's day
(*'The Welcoming Land'* 38)

12. An acronym for 'Poets, Essayists, Novelists', PEN was inaugurated in 1921 and continues to the present day its work to develop links between writers beyond national boundaries, focusing on literature as central to global culture, and commitment to fighting for freedom of expression (www.englishpen.org/events/no-time-like-the-present-margaret-storm-jameson) accessed Mar. 4 2020.

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1 Clemence Dane and the Inter-War Political, Cultural and Literary Context

Modernism and the Middlebrow

During the inter-war period, modernist literature became privileged by the literary establishment as the valid voice of a disillusioned post-war generation of writers. While it was applauded for replacing traditional realism with new literary forms believed to better reflect the fragmented nature of human consciousness, realist fiction remained the favoured form of what is now called the middlebrow, whose practitioners were derided as reactionary guardians of an outmoded nineteenth-century canon by modernists such as Virginia Woolf. Woolf accused the middlebrow of plying intellectually simplistic cause and effect plot structures and unambiguous narrative closures to seduce readers with reassuring ideological doctrines which falsified reality. In her opinion, middlebrow novels were the products of a 'middlebrow intelligence', unchallenging, deficient in integrity, with objectives connected, 'rather nastily, with money, fame, power, or prestige' (Woolf 'Middlebrow' 55). These sentiments were echoed by Q.D. Leavis, who famously condemned middlebrow texts for providing readers with 'the agreeable sensation of having improved themselves without incurring fatigue' (37). Middlebrow remains a derogatory term signifying second-rate 'sentimental' and 'middle class' writing, 'effeminate' when under male authorship, a discourse 'polluted by commerce' (Harker 16), and this attitude prevails among critics such as Rosa Bracco, who dismisses middlebrow authors as a 'mediocre literary group, distinguished only by big sales figures' (10). Middlebrow studies have contested these denigrations, re-evaluating the canon to provide counter arguments against modernism's assertion of literary supremacy, and revisiting reductive and falsifying binary oppositions which claim modernism as the only important aesthetic in the inter-war period. Middlebrow studies argue that omitting non-modernist writings from the canon has created a biased and incomplete record of literary history. Making space for other texts, they contend that modern literature is better understood as polysemic in essence, that 'modernism' and 'middlebrow' have been used too casually as umbrella terms to conflate multifarious types

of literature and literary and cultural networks. Middlebrow studies have thus begun to distinguish between ‘modern’, an inter-war term ‘to imply the socially, politically, and culturally changing present’ and the experiences and identities of inter-war subjects, and ‘modernist’, as ‘a retrospective critical term to signal a specific field of aesthetic production, characterized by formal experimentation and linked to a literary avant-garde’ (DiCenzo 36).¹

As the multifarious nature of modern literature is now starting to be recognised, a study of Dane’s work and her relationship with her literary environment is useful and pertinent to any re-examination of the nature of modern writing. Dane was exceptionally well-read, with an early reputation as a writer of quality, and her work is reflective of the complexity of modern consciousness and the modern age; some of it experiments with form and is introspective, and most makes negative appraisals of romantic love. Her first three novels in particular were acclaimed on publication as innovative, and even modernist. Reviewing *Regiment of Women* and *First the Blade*, writer St. John Adcock, described Dane as ‘intensely modern’, amongst the promising new novelists who have ‘cut loose from tradition and broken the rules of convention’ and are more ‘concerned with the psychology of their dramatis personae than with anything in the way of plot’ (‘Novelists Who’ *Scrapbook*). He included *Regiment of Women* in his discussion of modern novels demonstrating a ‘broadminded’ and ‘gritty’ absence of ‘mawkishness’, written by ‘honest’ authors who ‘refuse to blind themselves to the truth’ and when ‘searching for beauty’ and finding ‘ugliness [. . .] they must needs write down the impression it makes on them’ (ibid.). Despite the fact that the terms modernist and modernism were not widely used in their current senses until after 1940, *Punch* wrote in 1917 of *First the Blade*: ‘I have never seen a more complete vindication of the modernist preference for analysis and characterisation displayed through trivial incident’ (‘Our booking office’ *Scrapbook*). Her work was not tarred with the brush of middlebrow mediocrity and it was favourably compared to authors since esteemed as modernists. *The Saturday Westminster Gazette* classified *Regiment of Women* with Joseph Conrad’s novels (‘The Tendency’ *Scrapbook*); and *The Daily Chronicle* with James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (‘Being Read’ *Scrapbook*). Ford Madox Hueffer (later Ford) who counted her among those women who had ‘assumed a large share of the responsibility for carrying forward the arts’ while men were away fighting in the First World War, associates her methods of writing with those pioneered by Henry James and locates her work within the same literary tradition as Woolf, Joyce and Conrad (Hueffer 65). *The Mercury* made similar classifications, calling Conrad, H.G. Wells and Arnold Bennett ‘the three finest novelists still writing’, followed by Dane and Rose Macaulay in whose work, it claimed, ‘good things were to be found’ (qtd. in Graves and Hodges 55). Although her literary reputation was solid during the

inter-war years, however, her place in cultural history has been fleeting and has fallen victim to shifts in critical perspectives. Were it not for the socio-cultural resonance of her 1921 play, *A Bill of Divorcement* and the relevance of *Regiment of Women* to lesbian feminist criticism (it was re-issued in 1995 as part of the Virago 'Lesbian Landmarks' series), Dane would have suffered the fate of many of her other contemporaries whose work appeared with hers in collections of plays and short stories in the 1920s and 1930s and dropped out of literary consciousness altogether.

She may have been regarded in many quarters as innovative; she certainly considered modernists, Joyce, Woolf and Dorothy Richardson 'very considerable and brilliant' (*Tradition* 58), calling them the 'experimenters' (ibid.), to distinguish them from the pseudo 'highbrows', whose pretensions she despised, and she thought the premature death of Conrad, widely regarded as writing to 'resist the comparative comforts of Victorian clarity and look forward to the positions taken up by the writers of the Modernist canon' (Robins 18–19), to be 'the heaviest disaster that English literature has sustained since the death of Meredith' ('The Sea' 177), yet she primarily identified with middlebrow writers of the realist tradition, who she termed 'middle moderns' (*Tradition* 144). This allegiance is evident in the long and successful relationship which she enjoyed with her publisher, Heinemann, and her position on the selection panel of the middlebrow Book Society.² In her 1929 account of literary history, *Tradition and Hugh Walpole*, she comments on style and form in ways which reveal her preference for traditional plots and stable central protagonists, 'the tale and the people of the tale' (*Tradition* 86), the 'individual [. . .] related to the crowd' (89). At a time in which the older generation conceived 'the past [. . .] with nostalgic regret for lost values and lost security', regarding 'art as a vessel in which what has been lost in society can be preserved', and young writers 'were less likely to be reverent and nostalgic about the past, and more likely to confront the ruins of history in the spirit of a wrecking crew at a bomb-site, levelling in order to build something new' (Hynes 394–5), Dane records her alarm with the post-1910 highbrow enthusiasm for the 'indiscriminate smashing of Victorian icons' (Baldick 9). In her opinion, the War had transformed Joyce and Woolf from sense makers, 'creators [who] out of the apparent chaos of life, thought and sensation [. . .] were conjuring up form and forms' which related 'bodies and souls', to the dismantlers of these forms: 'destroyers, devoted to the disintegration of the novel, the play and the older verse' (*Tradition* 58).

Her conception of her readership as comprising the 'middle of humanity' ('Writer's' 13) – a term borrowed from Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*³ – denotes a middlebrow audience, without using the middlebrow label and echoes Hugh Walpole's definition of his middlebrow reader as 'the man in the street plus a little culture' (qtd. in *Tradition* 13). These phrases evidence Bracco's theory that 'middlebrow writers concentrated

their attention on ordinary human beings' (23); indeed, admiring the skill with which Walpole, a quintessentially middlebrow writer whom she held in particular high regard, satisfied audience desire, Dane actively courted a middlebrow readership. Convinced that the middlebrow was the place to register a common phenomenal world of shared modern experience, she was confident that her readers' ordinariness was likely to make them responsive to her broad-based bourgeois imagination and tastes, her paradoxical amalgam of liberal modern values and suspicion of moderns, and her pride in middle-class English culture and sensibilities. She paid homage to Walpole as the future promise of literature, whose modern mode of writing she believed was well-placed to defy modernist devastation and constituted a 'most valuable counter-irritant to the work of the Disintegrators' (*Tradition* 73). Walpole is no longer regarded as an agent of literary progressiveness and perhaps never was; Stella Gibbons described him as 'not only an over-rated writer with an unduly high opinion of himself, but the representative of a smug self-congratulatory literary establishment' (qtd. in Hammill 838), and her assessment exposes Dane's admiration as somewhat specious and her aesthetic and cultural tastes as out of step with the thinking of her more forward-thinking contemporaries. Her esteem for him was at one with her middlebrow sympathies; through her extended analysis of his work, which she saw as treading a middle path between high and lowbrowism, she advocated a flexible modern middlebrow, well-placed to save the novel form, which she regarded as 'unquestionably in incessant danger of standardization' (*Tradition* 61). She particularly admired his modernisations of the realist text, his narratives which balanced the methods of 'classic moderns', old-fashioned writers like Wells, Galsworthy and Bennet with the approaches of modernist experimentalists (144). She was perhaps misguided in her opinion that Walpole was key to the modern development of the novel but her faith in him was founded upon a spirit of forward-movement, a belief that literature must negotiate a position between tradition and innovation, to become 'based on tradition, but not dependent on tradition' (14).⁴ She coined the term 'traditive' to describe his venture – combining 'the old-fashioned tale with the innovation in idea which modernises it' (63), making literature new within a traditional framework. Her approval of certain modernist techniques which she detected in Walpole's work, his 'enrich[ment] of the novel [. . .] by the use of symbolism' in particular (64), suggests that she in no way objected to modernists' modifications of the novel form, and she conceded that 'it is possible, though not very pleasant, to realize that destruction may also be a form of creative art', that through dissection art will become 'enriched', that 'they are destroying in order to new-make' (59–61). Furthermore, while she strongly believed that 'traditive and pioneering novelists' possess 'all the virtues of maturity' and the 'pioneer' writer 'has the faults of the adolescent', she also attributes to traditionalism an undesirable 'prosiness, priggishness [and] garrulity' and to

the pioneers of experimentation, more positive attributes: 'wild imagination, and [. . .] hurtling energy, with passions uncontrollable' (92–93).

Perceiving that current audiences were demanding a 'blend' of didacticism, realism and fantasy (*Tradition* 14), in her estimation Walpole's novels worked for readers because they synthesised these literary forms that she believed had existed separately in different types of novel in the past, with descriptive realism occurring in the chronicle, didactic or prescriptive writing originating in the novel of manners, and fantasy underlying romance narratives. She sought to achieve this amalgamation herself in order to take the novel forward. She was highly aware that 'the writer's knowledge of what he or she believed to be the expectations of the reading public at the time is an inescapable aspect of the composition of the text' (Suleiman qtd. in Joannou 20) that, as revealed in her essay, 'The Writer's Partner', meeting reader expectation was vital 'if the end be not a starvation' for the writer (13). As Harker notes, 'middlebrow authors assume a sympathetic communion between and reader and writer' (19), and Dane was of this belief, that 'the reader and writer are of one flesh: and of their union the living book is born' (*Tradition* 14). She aimed to honour the perspective of the imaginary reader, who she saw as a collaborative partner in the production of the text who 'does actually have his creative share in the work done' ('Writer's' 17), and 'must be visualized and realized, so that he may be consulted' (18). She adopted the counter-elitist standpoint characteristic of middlebrow writers, who believed 'their work [was] a reflection of the concerns and aspirations of a wide public' and criticised 'the work of the highbrows [. . .] because of their detachment from the experience of most readers' (Bracco 124). Aiming for accessibility, she warned fellow authors that the reading public who 'knows what he wants' would desert any writer who gives him 'Chinese birds' nests' [high modernist novels] when he asks for a 'nourishing' staple, the 'bread' of traditional fiction ('Writer's' 24). Her criticism of highbrow writing then was tied up with her respect for the educated lower middle and upper working classes, both as discerning, sensitive, fundamentally commonsensical readers, who she credited with open mindedness, 'the power to read easily, a certain "instinct" that warns him against insincerity, a sense of humour, a fair ear, a willing soul, a hungry imagination, and curiosity' (*Tradition* 13) and as sympathetic narrative subjects. She admired Sir Walter Scott precisely because he was not 'a highbrow', aimed not for 'art for art's sake affectation' (36), but 'made the novel the expression [. . .] of the life of the people as a whole, instead of the amusement merely of certain classes', by depicting 'life in every class, from the life of the king to the life of the gipsy [. . .] tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, apothecary, ploughboy, gentleman, thief' (34–35).

Leavis considered middlebrow readers to be malleable creatures but Dane understood that notwithstanding their ordinariness they were powers to be reckoned with. In tune with writers of 'the modern movement'

as a whole, who trusted readers 'adult powers of inference and autonomous judgment' (Baldick 167), she was not averse to addressing difficult topics. She considered a modern adaptation of Gay's 1728 *Beggar's Opera* objectionable because it substituted the hanging of MacHeath with a happy ending, in her view, a piece of 'savage insolence' ('Writer's' 13) which denied fundamental audience entitlement and was tantamount to a patronising jeer of 'you couldn't stand as big a dose of truth as that, could you?' (ibid.). Routinely 'canvassing among readers and friends' for opinions on popular reading habits ('Short Stories' 20), she understood that the mood of her times following the War which 'broke in two the life of the nation' (*Tradition* 44) and 'left no man or woman, no trade or profession unaltered' (218) demanded scepticism, for authors to speak in 'these strained after-years [to the] apathy [of] the returned soldier and the war haunted civilian alike' ('Books to Buy' 24). Indeed, *Regiment of Women*, *Adam's Opera*, and her short story 'The Valiant Little Tailor', specifically meet the criterion for modernism established by Ezra Pound, for literature which challenges the predisposition of the traditionalist text 'to mention absolutely nothing unpleasant' (qtd. in Ardis 115). She was not compliant with the recommendation made by publisher, Michael Joseph, in his 1924 manual *Writing for Profit*, that aspiring writers should pen 'nothing heavy, morbid or neurotic' (qtd. in Leavis 28), or Heinemann's specification for 'pleasant' novels (St John 210), baulking at fiction which ignored the unpleasant aspects of life every bit as much as the modernists, as many of her narrative events demonstrate: the hanging of the tailor in 'The Valiant Little Tailor', the suicide of a young schoolgirl in *Regiment of Women*, and a mob-lynching in *Adam's Opera*. A conversance with her outlook problematises processes of categorisation which have reductively labelled middlebrow texts as conservative and dismissed middlebrow texts as mere light, conformist antidotes to the nihilism and alienation of modernist works, 'deal [ing] in soothing and not disturbing sentiments', vacuous, with 'limited appeals and a certain restricted outlook' which 'spoilt the public for fiction [. . .] of a more serious nature' (Leavis 32, 37). Dane's themes are challenging, and her work fashioned for a mature, imaginative and discerning middle-of-humanity readership. She visualised her readers as discerning, but not radical however, and in the preface to her pro league-of-nations 1928 play, *Adam's Opera*, she offers an apology for its political nature to soften the effect of its biting satire, assuaging any conservative feelings within middlebrow audiences. Insisting that it is 'the situation that interests me' and not 'the rights and wrongs of the case' which she is 'not attempting to discuss' (xiv), she tries for the common touch, claiming to 'know no more than the average man or woman knows of politics and policies, of stagecraft and finance', because her 'opinion, like the opinion of most busy men and women concerned in their own affairs, is valueless because it is uninstructed' (xii). This method of creating a rapport with

the 'average' reader pervades her writing. Comments such as 'a genius can write about a genius, but it takes one of ourselves to write about us ordinary folk' ('Trollope' 166), denote the kind of feigned commonality timelessly employed by journalists working on mainstream publications and in television, which can be traced in her own journalism. Indeed, as her career progressed, she balanced her more controversial remarks with hegemonic responses to 'the media's requests for her opinions on a variety of social and domestic issues of the day', which 'erased the memory of her earlier notoriety' (Gale 'Many Masks' 58).

Feminist Consciousness

Many of Dane's remarks reveal an ambivalence about her role as an author and the purpose of her writing. Many current literary and cultural critics argue that inter-war women authors often used middlebrow forms and features to convey liberal positions (Bluemel 11, Harker 20), questioning Alison Light's famous reading of middlebrow female writers as politically regressive despite their modernity, and Dane was indeed progressive in this respect, 'a political creature' (Gale 'From Fame' 135) who utilised 'story-telling, [as] the only means at her disposal of challenging public opinion' (Barrow 98), particularly with regard to gender issues. Irrespective of the fact that she was careful to prioritise the demands and concerns of her readers, credit them with good judgement and avoid taking an openly didactic approach, stating, 'I am a writer, and my job is stories – not sermons', she clearly believed that 'art for art's sake [. . .] is not enough for without a message literature and the theatre are of no use, serve no purpose and have no future' (*Oakland Tribune* Sept 4, 1932). 'Caught between scorn and respect for the audience' (Gale, 'From Fame' 135), she also felt compelled to write for her readers in a prescriptive manner, often against her own desire. 'From the moment my first novel was published,' she commented, 'I became [. . .] endowed with a kind of mission. Not my idea. I hate preaching; I never mean to preach; I think preaching unwarrantable: but somehow, a moral judgement, a sort of dolefulness is always creeping in' (qtd. in J.V.C. 'Clemence Dane: Novelist and Playwright' *Melbourne Advocate* May 3 1934). Living and writing in a period in which 'it would not be going too far to say that the climate in inter-war Britain was anti-feminist' (Beddoe 4), she may have found it prudent and perhaps felt comfortable with refraining from referring to herself as 'feminist', calling the epithet at one point 'a horrid word' ('Some Translations' 118), but she was not averse to taking 'the risk of being called "feminist"' (ibid.) in order to attack patriarchal practices and was a vocal advocate for women's rights, holding strong progressive views on wide issues relating to gender politics. She began her career writing for *Women's Leader*, the paper for the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, and like those other better-known feminists,

Winifred Holtby and Brittain, she published articles in *Time and Tide*, a 'feminist' paper which 'projected an image of the career woman and the adventurous woman as positive and desirable' (Beddoe 16). She was also a committee member of Lady Rhonnda's Six Point Group, descended from pre-war suffragist organisation, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). *Time and Tide* urged its readership to join the group 'to bring effective political pressure to bear upon the government to induce it to do justice to women and children and to set an example to the nation to do likewise' ('Six Point Group' 29) and Dane was the first speaker at least one Six Point Group meeting in 1922, the same year that the group drew up blacklists of male MPs who had spoken against women's interests during the lead-up to the general election that year.⁵ She was also a regular contributor along with feminist-identified writers, Vera Brittain, Storm Jameson, E.M. Delafield, Virginia Woolf and Rose Macaulay, to *Good Housekeeping*, a popular inter-war publication which 'became a channel for awareness, independence and self-reliance among women' (Carey qtd. in Briganti and Mezzei 6). Furthermore, her first play, *A Bill of Divorcement* (1921) was notorious for its feminism.

Believing that 'every boy and girl should learn how to cook and sew and how to fix the plumbing' ('Clemence Dane enjoys wild west stories' *Winnipeg Free Press*, Nov 2 1932), Dane's philosophies are consistent with and often more radical than the principal doctrines of inter-war feminism. She forcefully outlines her position in *The Women's Side* (1926), an extended critique of patriarchal culture comprising ten polemical chapters, first published as separate articles in *Good Housekeeping*. Dissociating herself in the text from 'our extreme feminists' (*Women's* 14) is not necessarily indicative of a disavowal of feminism; indeed, her claim later on in the book that 'the emancipation of women' is 'next in importance' after the abolition of slavery to the 'emancipation of humanity as a whole' (118) proves, as Emily Hamer notes, its 'practical demonstration of her commitment to women' (85). It attends to current social and political issues related to women's concerns throughout: the widening of suffrage, woman's role, the death penalty, educational reform, acting in schools, religion, marriage laws, spinsterhood and the relationship between gender and genius. Its title, part of a Kipling quotation, 'shout it so the woman's side can hear!' from his 1910 poem, 'Song of the Men's Side', reflects the aspirations of *Time and Tide*, 'to teach women to view issues from a woman's point of view' (H. Smith 50). On publication, it received an accolade from key suffrage publication *The Vote* newspaper, which proclaimed 'from the suffrage point of view this little book is excellent propaganda, and we wish it all success', and expressed its confidence that

the magic of the writer's name will recommend the volume to the non-feminist and the 'Anti-, and it will do them good! [. . .] compelling

[women]to sit up and take notice of the problems which should have been engaging their attention long ago [. . .] matters which every intelligent woman should take time to think over and make up her mind about.

(Jan 28 1927)

Between 1919 and 1933 *The Vote* was the journalistic voice of the British Women's Freedom League, a feminist organisation committed to the establishment of 'a gender-neutral society' or 'equality feminism' as it was called (H. Smith 48)⁶ so its praise of *The Women's Side* is significant. It construed the intended readership of Dane's book as 'unawakened women, of whom there are still plenty in our midst [who] may wear short skirts and shorter hair – at the bidding of Dame Fashion – but . . .] still accept the standards and conventions of an earlier day' (*The Vote* Jan 28 1927); this echoes Dane's foreword to her text, which fully articulates the cultural anxieties of older New Women living in an unstable post-war world, concerned that newly enfranchised women were not taking their new responsibilities seriously, failing to engage with expanding roles in the public sphere hard-won by a previous generation, and disregarding opportunities now available to benefit women and humanity as a whole. Using metaphors of barriers and thresholds, Dane argues for an escalation in women's liminality, for politically apathetic moderns to cease 'sitting down' at home 'with the windows shut', to 'look over the fence' and cross the household threshold to 'join in the general discussion' in the public world of combat and engagement. She warns women that the domestic milieu, the 'seclusion of the Women's Side' provides only an illusion of safety and security; in reality it is the seat of ignorance, powerlessness and cowardice, threatened by 'laws, wars, strikes and revolutions'. Challenging these women to prove her 'already a mile behind the times', she suggests they have a lot of catching up to do. Her outlook corresponds with the perspective of other inter-war feminists, including MP and women's rights campaigner, Eleanor Rathbone, who remembered the strength of the suffrage movement then became increasingly frustrated by the inertia of many newly franchised women and a younger generation who, 'had never known the harsher forms of inequality' which existed prior to the Great War and were unappreciative of the hard path trodden by older women to secure the better conditions of the present (H. Smith 62).

The opening chapter of *The Women's Side*, 'A Game of Speculation' endeavours to persuade young women to venture into the public world. Challenging the widespread hegemonic 'notion that man was innately superior to woman' (Joannou 4), it claims that 'if we say that woman is the most important thing in the universe [. . .] we are not being conceited' (*Women's* 13). Dane makes her claim for female supremacy on the grounds of women's heightened 'understanding' and 'imagination

[. . .] love [and] sympathy' (14). Later in the book, she suggests that these qualities are possessed in abundance by certain singular women and particularly an 'amazing list of history makers' including Joan of Arc, Boudicca, Florence Nightingale and Marie Curie, which she itemises therein to redress normative assumptions that agency is necessarily a correlation of masculinity and to offer role models for inter-war women (135).⁷ Three years earlier, she foregrounded the important place of women in myth and history for an even younger female readership, in the first edition of *The Guiding Book*. In what is intrinsically a conduct text aiming to inspire a confident reconstruction of national identity in a climate of post-war grief and demoralisation, wedged between accounts of imperialist war deeds by Kipling, Baden Powell and John Masefield, sits her own 'And Women' (38), an ironic addendum to 'The Examples of Great Men', Masefield's preceding entry about the First-World-War battle of Gallipoli (36–37). In the same way that the title of *The Women's Side* forefronts Kipling's othering of women in 'Song of the Men's Side', 'And Women' implies that Masefield's piece is unbalanced, unfinished, that by marginalising women and ignoring their contributions to the War, he fails to tell the whole story. In her playful reprimand, she offers up a counter discourse to the ubiquitous patriarchal script, extending the concept of heroism to encompass women's agency in a female narrative of the 'seven wonders of the woman's world' (38) which reclaims an invisibilised female past from the metanarrative of history. By inserting poetess Sappho, Helen of Troy, Beatrice, St Joan, Mary Magdalene, the Virgin Mary and Eve into cultural history, her feminist anthem moderates the imperial message of *The Guiding Book* as a whole. She is not isolated in her consciousness-raising enterprise: *Man Proud Man*, a 1932 collection of consensual feminist essays on the subject of gender, corresponds to Dane's pronouncements of female supremacy and the pre-eminence of women's imaginative faculties. Taking its title from a line from *Measure for Measure*: 'man proud man/dressed in a little brief authority', it comprises a series of chapters by Mary Borden, Storm Jameson, Rebecca West, Susan Ertz, Helen Simpson, Sylvia Townsend Warner, G.B. Stern, and E.M. Delafield. It appeared in a slightly different form in the United States the same year under the title: *The More I see of Men*; in this version Simpson's piece is omitted and Stern's is a different one than that selected for the British publication. It also includes additional chapters by Margaret Culkin Banning and Isabel Paterson and an introduction by Frederick Lewis Allen outlining the purpose of the collection: to 'formulate[s]' women's ideas about men into a 'generalisation' in retaliation for centuries of men generalising about women (x5). In this text, like Dane, Jameson regards manhood as 'spiritually and mentally' predisposed to 'deteriorate more quickly than women' (194–5) and Delafield describes 'imaginative' men as in 'a very small minority' (155).⁸

In Dane's view, because the keen woman's imagination enables her 'to see in a world run by men all sorts of real and apparent injustices' (*Women's* 16), it is imperative for her to widen her sphere for the social good. In the second chapter of *The Women's Side*, 'Youth and the Vote', Dane focusses her argument on the necessity for greater political deployment of the female imagination and she urges an extension of the franchise to women between twenty-one and thirty, in harmony with inter-war feminist campaigns for this legal reform. She understands but 'cannot sympathise' with 'the alarm felt in certain quarters' about expanding female suffrage, 'certain quarters', referring to 'the average man', who fails to see girls other than as dancing partners and is ignorant of how 'a girl behaves in community life, of how far she is capable [. . .] of devotion to civic or national ideals' (28). She expresses her counter-opinion – that being an amalgam of 'brain' and 'heart' (25), the female imagination is more well-rounded than men's, that contrary to patriarchal stereotypes about women's irrationality and emotionality, women are 'the more reliable, the steadier of the sexes' (26) and their successes in the 'short time' they have been enfranchised provide a strong indication that 'the hurtling twenties' can achieve so much more (28). She urges conservative doubters to go and see women in action as 'the heads of institutions, universities, hospitals and co-educational schools if you want an unbiased judgment of your young English womanhood' (*ibid.*). She particularly objects to the ways in which the limits of women's educational achievement have been 'caught up and twisted by the anti-feminists into an argument' against extending the suffrage (29), and suggests that in the light of the bravery and self-sacrifice in the war shown in the actions of 'the young girls who worked, and sickened, and died, by drowning, pestilence and shell', England can no longer reasonably 'deny half of her children their enfranchisement' (31).

She believes that the special connection between female imagination, empathy and social conscience which she outlines in 'A Game of Speculation' means that young women are ideally placed to direct their vote to 'influence the counsels of the people!' on legislation related to the prevention of 'Cruelty to Children and Child Assault' as well as 'lunacy' and divorce reform (28–32). These were the issues that particularly troubled her. According to *Time and Tide*, 'child-welfare to her [was] more than a phrase. It [was] a religion' ('Personalities' 56). She was involved in running an orphanage, and in her role with the Six Point Group she joined other former suffragettes to produce a pamphlet entitled *Facts: Child Assault*, to raise awareness of child abuse.⁹ The 'injustice of the divorce law appalled her' too (Barrow 7), she declared that the findings of the report of the 1921 royal commission on divorce, 'made me so indignant that I wanted to write about it' ('Popular novelist scores with new play on divorce' *Salt Lake City Deseret News*, 23 April, 1921 p. 27) and her first play, *A Bill of Divorcement*, was written the same year to create a strong argument

for an alteration of matrimonial law. Under the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, currently still in place in the early 1920s, men were able to sue for divorce for adultery while women who wished to end their marriage on the same grounds were compelled to prove additional abuses such as incest, cruelty, bigamy or desertion. A bill aiming to redress this injustice and extend divorce grounds to permit women to rid themselves of insane, drunkard, or jailed husbands for the first time entered the statute four years after the commission, signalling to Dane a moral recognition 'for the first time [of a woman's] absolute right as a human being to the same law and the same justice that a man enjoys' (*Women's* 107). *The Women's Side* regarded divorce reform as 'one of the most important advances in women's history' (Cameron 'Irreconcilable' 478) but a year after the act, there was still much more to do. With this in mind, Dane allocated a chapter of *The Women's Side*, 'The Marriage Laws', to a discussion of the 'problem' of women still 'suffering cruelly' and 'tied' into unhappy marriages (100). In it, she presses for further changes to matrimonial legislation including divorce by mutual consent which, when it finally entered the statute in 1969, brought to a close a disagreeable ritual practiced by unhappily married couples of staging adultery in order to meet the existing divorce criteria. Insisting that 'the problems of marriage are the private business of the individual' (109), Dane expresses a hope in her chapter that divorce reformers 'will continue to point to those countries who solve the problem of the impossible marriage, not by insisting on the disgusting farce of a pretended adultery, but by letting the people concerned, after a probationary period, part by mutual consent' (ibid.). She specifically cites Denmark, which had made this reform in 1922 (114–15).

The Women's Side evidences cautiousness and anxiety about the perils generated by increased liminality as well as the pleasures. New opportunities for women in the modern world generated a backward-looking sense of anxiety for what had been lost, even in some feminist quarters, and Dane was one of those who worried about the implications of change. Winning rights 'in principle if not in practice', she believed that these had come with the expectation that women do the lion share of the national workload to the detriment of their health and strength (17). She identified historic and contemporary ironies in woman's social position. In her view, woman's superior imagination was inextricable from her enhanced sense of empathy and this had long been a factor in her powerlessness, because it meant a regrettable and exploitable predilection towards self-sacrifice. She points this out, not to advocate female martyrdom in support of traditional anti-feminist ideologies, but to register her concern for gender justice. 'This extra education of her imagination', she writes, 'has, by a strange yet natural irony, long been the excuse for laying upon woman all the lesser burdens [. . .] she has not only been the world's housewife, but the world's drudge' (14). She fears that to this day 'man has made a very good bargain' (22); just as woman's altruism

was the cause of her historical subordination, her positive potential to work for real social change in the modern world was currently impaired by overwork, the burden of her goodwill, which generated widespread exhaustion. National bodily fatigue was particularly intense and pervasive at this point in post-First World War history, and according to Dane, women's increased physical vulnerability was a significant 'fault of the fact that there are more women than men' (15–16), that 'in these strenuous after-years of war she is in the position of vestal, bound to keep alight the sacred flame, but always in danger of running short of fuel' (22). 'The Game of Speculation' is so called because of a multiple analogy which Dane draws between Maria Bertram's willingness to gamble in a card game of speculation in *Mansfield Park*, her hazardous decision to leave her husband and run away with Henry Crawford, and the risk taken by modern women when they foray into public spaces. Maria wins the card game and ostensibly Henry too but she is ultimately the loser when he abandons her and her reputation is ruined; this is matched, Dane believes, by a situation in which modern women appear the victors in a battle of sexes because of a social context in which large numbers of men have been removed from the workplace or rendered unfit for work by the war, but are too often entering professions out of crushing economic necessity rather than choice, making it vital for 'we [. . .] independent women' to ensure that our 'game' as 'emancipated women, business women, bachelor women, with degrees and damships and seats in parliament [. . .] will always pay us for what we have given to secure it' (12). She expresses anxiety that unless real progress is made on women's terms, 'we shall have given more to secure our game than the game is worth' (24) and identifies a problematic modern situation whereby what a woman has won is man's expectation for her to do everything, as housewife and 'bread-winner' (21). She continues:

she may go out to her business all day, but she still has to run her household as well. She may have to contribute to the household funds; but she must also be ready to bear children. She may work as long as a man; but because her physical strength is less she must be content with less wages [. . .] and because she is a woman [she] must be able to sew, cook, clean, shop and make her own clothes: that is the woman's part.
(*Women's* 21–22)

In a subsequent interview with the *Oakland Tribune*, she re-articulates her feminist indignation with the new burden experienced by women who had recently discovered that equality meant a doubling of their workload. She berates the emergence of a new cultural expectation that:

although she gives her entire days [. . .] in the office or to her business or her art the tired woman still feels it her duty to save the tired

man his share of the domesticity [while] the menfolk, though knowing that their wives are physically occupied in the day in many cases still have the feeling [. . .] that the domestic side of life belongs to the woman’.

(Sept 4 1932)

These observations could well strike a chord with today’s working mothers, and her pronouncement, ‘this situation will have to be adjusted’ (ibid.), anticipates contemporary post-feminist thinking. So does her frustration with the pay gap. Gender-related salary discrepancies preoccupied her throughout the inter-war period and beyond. In 1941, for instance, in an article for the *Daily Herald*, ‘Fair Play and Fair Pay’, she interrogates patriarchal intentions to limit women’s access to work and fair wages in the wake of men’s forthcoming return from the Second World War. Arguing passionately for equal pay, she gives voice to women who she believes are demanding, ‘why have one column in the national account-book for men and another for women?’, insisting ‘have one column for human beings, and be done with it!’, because ‘people should be paid according to the quantity and quality of their work and for no other reason’ and ‘when they do as much work and as good work for as long hours as a man, their rate of pay, their pensions and their compensations for injuries shall not be lessened because they are women, or unmarried’ (20 March, 1941 p. 7).

Dane felt a strong feminist antipathy to patriarchal culture beyond its culpability in making gender trouble or ‘economic war between men and women’ (*Women’s* 22–23) and she shifts her discussion in *The Women’s Side* between women’s domestic perils and world politics, particularly peace-time European reconstruction. Calling war ‘woman’s enemy’ which ‘no woman will ever see the sense of’ (qtd. in Barrow 98), she connected the oppressions of carte-blanche masculinity in nineteenth-century German gender politics to First-World-War military aggression, writing: ‘I cannot refrain from suggesting that the Germany of the twentieth century was, at least in part, the result of the attitude of the German man to the German woman in the nineteenth!’ (*Some Translations* 118). This was no xenophobic mistrust of Germans as a people however; she was equally disappointed with masculinist authorities on the Allied side. She was an internationalist, deeply disappointed with British reluctance to assume responsibility for the privations of post-war mainland Europe. Like Brittain, Holtby, and comrades in the Communist party of Great Britain including Iris Murdoch (Conradi 69), she was a member of the League of Nations Union, ‘the most influential anti-war group in Britain’, whose ‘political innovations and idealism [. . .] promised a new dawn of international collaboration’ (Berry and Bostridge 155). Opposing Noel Coward on account of his somewhat narrow outlook, she argued vehemently ‘in defence of the Germans, saying something of the miseries I had

seen in Germany as a result of the Versailles treaty' (qtd. in Barrow 101). She alludes to 'the watch on the Ruhr'¹⁰ and 'the tin-can speeches of general elections' (*Women's* 24) as examples of British patriarchal failures of humanity. Her feminist reflections on the post-war international scene, that 'woman might do much more with her freedom than use it merely to help in elaborating a civilisation which falls foul of her profoundest instincts' (ibid.), were countenanced by some of her more overtly politicised feminist contemporaries, suffragist Maude Roydon, and writers Winifred Holtby, Vera Brittain, West and Woolf. On a pacifist anti-Ruhr lecture tour of the Scottish border towns in 1924, Brittain was disappointed that 'most people in these little places don't know the first thing about it, and care less' (Berry and Bostridge 191) and Roydon hoped men could be persuaded 'to cease thinking of the world as a battlefield and to begin thinking of it as a home' through the power of women's feminine 'vision' (qtd. in Kent 79). This faith in women's visionary power to save a world threatened by aggressive patriarchal governments figures regularly within feminist rhetoric including *The Women's Side*, in which Dane proposes a radical 'third path' to lessen the chilling possibility of another war in Europe, a process of 'simplification', a kind of bloodless pastoral revolution against patriarchy and renunciation of patriarchal urbanity, together with the necessary subordination of men in the interests of women and humanity (23–24). Her distinctly modern-period anxieties about international politics and the strain of city living are assuaged by her prescription that woman, because she is 'too good for it. It's waste', rather than 'acquiescing in the artificial civilisation of today' (24), the 'modern life of the great cities, this whirl and rush and hustle, this nightmare of bad air and slums and dirt and traffic and over-crowding this [. . .] machine – made nightmare!' (23), as 'half of the human race, should set to work to impose upon the other half a civilisation of her own- a civilisation of the country, not of the towns!' (24). She envisages a space for rightful female domination over men, an alternative domestic model for women seeking an 'alternative [. . .] between working herself to death and relapsing into Victorianism' (23) Rejecting the symbolic order and the industrial capitalism and war machine which it has created in favour of a motherland or alternative feminine or feminised pastoral social system designed and managed by women, is also mooted by Mary Borden in *Man Proud Man*. She embraces a feminist utopian vision driven by an inter-war national enthusiasm for new garden cities, hopes that future womankind will 'do away with cities altogether [. . .] and organise vast garden cities each with a decentralised centre of industry' (36).

Speaking out against patriarchal authority on these matters aligns Dane with her feminist contemporaries; who shared her confidence that the time had come to give voice to a female power in the ascendancy. Yet while feminist critics, Maggie Gale, Rebecca D'Monté, and Rebecca Cameron, working in the field of theatre history, have begun to recognise

Dane's feminism, other literary academics, including Terry Castle, Alison Hennegan and Penny Boumelha have cast doubt upon her feminist credentials. This can be explained by the fact that *Regiment of Women*, reductively interpreted by lesbian critics as a piece of anti-lesbian rhetoric, which has become a sturdy rope to hang Dane with, is the only one of her texts which has achieved much literary attention, and her feminist-inflected novels and short stories have long been ignored. Another reason for critical discrepancies in the reception of her work might be the undoubtedly contradictory nature of her arguments which sometimes make her gender politics difficult to pin down. *The Women's Side* seeks to deconstruct traditional constructions of womanliness, but some of it is fraught with what ostensibly appear to be conservative outlooks. It recommends emigration for single women for instance, generally considered a reactionary anti-feminist policy. Claiming that women have a biological predisposition towards physical and nervous collapse is also gender-politically problematical. Given that parliament, hospitals and the BBC were among the organisations who used women's alleged predisposition to strain as reason to block them from entering traditionally male-identified professions, and the *Vote* registered its strong objection to this policy,¹¹ Dane's suggestion – possibly attributable to her own experience of poor health – that women were inevitably blighted by an 'age-old struggle with physical weakness' which made them more frail than men (15), was somewhat unhelpful to the women's cause. At one point she also denies the historical oppression of women, suggesting that 'however man has treated women in theory, in practice it seems that he generally did as she told him' (21), providing spurious examples from patriarchal literary metanarratives as evidence for her hypothesis: the dominance of the Wife of Bath over her five husbands, and the efficacy of the central female protagonist in texts by Shakespeare, Richardson, Austen and Meredith who 'emerges triumphant' at the close of her narrative (20). Given Second Wave feminism's rigorous project to deconstruct false representations of female experience in male-authored texts, and to call into question the integrity of Shakespeare's gender politics in particular, it is difficult to find such a theory of gender history based on fictitious examples convincing or helpful to women. Indeed, while Dane was writing *The Women's Side*, Woolf was only three years away from pointing out that woman, from 'about 1470' to the present (*A Room* 54), had not in reality had the power to prove that she was as 'great as a man, some think even greater', and the masculine literary imagination had fabricated ideas of inherent female inferiority in order to disguise the reality of patriarchal tyranny which had her 'locked up, beaten and flung about the room' (55–56). Dane's quasi-historical conservative interpretation of English literature was about to be discredited by Woolf's historical research, and this comparison between the two feminists demonstrates fundamental weaknesses in Dane's feminist analysis which was perhaps

coloured by her exposure to the dominant inter-war literary theory of New Criticism and its premise that the truth, universality and integrity of 'great' literature was undisputable.

Equally contentious, and somewhat puzzling given the strength of her conviction of female supremacy, are moments where she argues that women's imaginations are less robust than men's, and subscribes to culturally widespread negative stereotypes about middle-aged women. Although Dane was thirty-eight herself when she wrote *The Women's Side*, she comfortably asserts that 'by forty woman is fixed in her mould' (27) and 'after forty the advantage is all with the man: he continues to grow years after the woman's prime is definitely over' (26). Moreover, of the qualities of her great women: 'The song of Sappho/ The face of Helen/ The beckoning hand of Beatrice/ The sword of Joan/ The passion of the Magdalen/ The grief of God's Mother/ And the immortal spirit in the burdened body of Eve, the labourer's wife' (*And Women* 38), only two – poetic creativity and warrior courage – can be classed as role-model material; the others are representative of traditional roles normalised under patriarchy: martyrs, victims, enticers, muses and helpmates. She applies a shaky essentialist logic to her conceptualisation of the nature of genius, too, a much debated topic in this period, promoting a somewhat reactionary philosophy of literary and art history in the process. Asserting that 'genius has always made its own opportunities' (*Women's* 134) and even blind and poor men have managed to be creative, she considers that the scarcity of texts in the literary canon credited to female authorship is unrelated to any deprivation of 'education and opportunity' (133) and attributable instead to historical patterns of synthesis in textual production between genius in a man and a more nebulous complementary 'feminine of genius [in] the creature who drives him to create'. The invisibility and marginalised status of this 'creature' she does not appear to find problematic (137–8). In the light of Woolf's contemporaneous project, explicated in *A Room of One's Own*, to contextualise literary tradition by pointing out the material disadvantages which had prevented women in history from achieving literary merit, her gender politics show as decidedly shaky. Reinterpreting Shakespeare's works of genius as the products of favoured cultural circumstances, Woolf argues that genius 'could (not) have been born among women whose work began [. . .] almost before they were out of the nursery, who were forced to it by their parents and held to it by all the power of law and custom' (63). Her fervent belief that 'a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction' (4), exposes Dane's judgement as less than feminist, not only by today's standards but by the inter-war standard which Woolf set. Furthermore, Dane's contention that an inter-war culture of *expectation* existed in which a woman was urged 'to educate herself [and] take her share in public life' (*Women's* 121), exhibits little sense of awareness of inter-war barriers to women's employment. It is an over-optimistic,

unrealistic and complacent claim perhaps, considering Deirdre Beddoe's research which concludes that, 'the single most arresting feature of the inter-war years was the strength of the notion that women's place is in the home, [and it was] considered wilful and perverse of a woman to wish to earn her own living' (3) and Haskell's findings that 'public opinion was hostile to women workers who were keeping men's jobs instead of keeping house [and] they were seen as leeches and bloodsuckers for wanting decent wages and not being willing to go back to domestic work' (qtd. in Klein 96–97). It is debateable whether women in the inter-war period had succeeded, as Dane claimed, in turning 'the claim of equality of opportunity into a fact' or had lived in 'this great house of freedom', where 'even the most prejudiced are grudgingly admitting that it is better [. . .] that women should keep herself rather than be kept' (*Women's* 122–3). Her observation may well have reflected her own circumstances rather than the experience of most women and seems out of touch with the prevailing spirit of prejudice and misogyny.

Yet although some of Dane's values may appear gender conservative in relation to post-Second Wave feminist consciousness, neither her essentialism, her conviction that opportunities for women's economic independence were increasing rapidly and a basic state of equality for women had been established, or her anxieties about the possible negative effects of shouldering masculine roles, are inconsistent with inter-war feminist philosophies as a whole. Even Woolf, whose thinking was radically ahead of its time, corroborates Dane's endorsement of the symbiotic union of male genius and his female muse who, in her opinion, offered 'some stimulus, some renewal of creative power which is the gift only of the opposite sex to bestow' (*A Room* 112). She has been accused of retreating from the implications of her feminism, particularly in Chapter five of *A Room of One's Own*, in which she backtracks from her commitment to androgyny for which she is well-known, with an assertion that 'it would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men, or looked like men. [. . .] Ought not education bring out and fortify the differences rather than the similarities?' (114). Significantly, *The Vote's* feminist principles were not offended by Dane's questionable gendered concept of genius. Its reviewer of *The Women's Side* passes only a mild judgement on 'Miss Dane's explanation of the fact that genius is so rare among women', calling this 'interesting, if not quite convincing'. The paper conservatively objects more to Dane's 'inspiration' theory, her suggestion that the great men of literature were not the sole creators of their work, 'that every work of genius is produced by the marriage of two minds, and that she who inspires is as much its author as he can create' (*The Vote* Jan 28 1927). It responds to this idea with indignation: 'personally, I refuse to believe that Fanny Brawne was the spiritual counterpart of Keats, or that the Dark Lady of the Sonnets was as great a genius as Shakespeare!' (ibid.).

Furthermore, Dane is not unusual amongst inter-war feminists in her assumption that in the modern age the battle for women's right to support herself and to be a bread winner has all but been won and that 'pretty soon [. . .] there will be no list of professions to which women belong, but a new small list of professions to which women don't belong, like prize-fighting and soldiering' (*Women's* 121). The authors of *Man Proud Man*, for instance, share her confidence in the equalising impulses of the zeitgeist. Their consensus is that men have now begun to willingly relinquish their mastery to women, contradicting contemporary critical viewpoints that opportunities for women were limited in the inter-war period. Stern is convinced that at the period in which she was writing, 'the economic situation develops in favour of women' (198), Borden is optimistic that woman's innate mental superiority will ultimately see her 'taking over all the tiresome brainwork for herself, and leaving [men] the manual labour only' (*The More I See* 38). West believes she has seen 'that blessed day when the star of female dominance dawned' (*Man Proud Man* 268), asserts comfortably that 'the superiority of women is now admitted by all, save the more neurotic and over-educated sort of man' (261) and looks to a future where women will assume all public responsibility leaving men's 'highest destiny as the husbands and fathers of good women' (282-257). Jameson concurs. After 1918, she declares, 'no one believed [. . .] that any work will be done better by a man than by a woman, or that there was any difference between the powers of men and women, except the secondary one of sexual function' (*The More I See* 185) and continues, 'as a matter of common observation, no man will now offer to support a wife who can support herself, and in an increasing number of recorded cases the tendency among men married to self-supporting women is towards complete dependence' (186). In her view, only a 'persistent refusal to adapt himself to' the 'present age' among a few men can account for the rare cases still in existence where wives are supported (188-9). She elaborates:

a man who supports his wife today is either wilfully living in the past, or is being held to it by the deliberate attitude of his wife. The normal tendency of the male is towards being supported. Women, on the other hand, tends normally to do the supporting. Every change in the position of women since the beginning of the century has been towards independence, economic and spiritual.

(190-1)

Holtby agreed. Addressing The Women's Freedom League in 1930 she declared that 'the difference which has so far existed between men and women writers [which] is not fundamental but one of circumstance [. . .] is now rapidly fading into the background' (*The Vote* Oct 31 1930), and in 1935 she wrote in the *Yorkshire Post* that following 'the most notable'

twenty-five years 'in the whole history of British women [. . .] we take it for granted that women should become surgeons, engineers and ministers' (qtd. in Bingham 81). Perhaps the situation was more complex than Beddoe and Haskell suggest.

Dane's feminist peers also shared her ambivalence about adding public roles to women's responsibilities; many were negative about leaving the private world of home. Borden mourns the lost 'cave [. . .] still the woman's ideal home', complains that woman 'didn't want to leave the lazy, warm, protected seclusion where she could eat, sleep, and play with her children while her man went out to fight for her and provide for her' (*The More I See* 47). Holding to a somewhat romantic and unrealistic conception of woman's traditional role, she imagines her in the past leisurely playing with her children when in reality only the wealthiest women would have had time away from the burdens of unending domestic labour for relaxing with family. She idealises women's 'lost luxuries of obedience and fear' and contends that 'the last thing she wanted was power and responsibility. For thousands of years she has fought to retain her precious captivity [and] women have never wanted to be free, independent, and self-reliant. They have struggled valiantly for their right to remain the submissive adoring slaves of men [. . .] their emancipation was inevitable, but the history of their emancipation is not a tale of triumph, it is a story of long disillusion and disappointment' (49). Even though she was a former suffragette and worked as a nurse on the frontline in both wars, she is uncomfortable about relinquishing domestic seclusion and profoundly anxious about entering the public 'jungle' which 'no one but a fool wants' (48). Her account of modern women 'forced into a position of responsibility, deprived of the protection she once enjoyed, obliged to enter the arena of public affairs and fight to earn her daily bread' is unsettling to say the least (49–50). While Dane wants the public world to change to suit women, Borden seeks retreat into the private world. Jameson feels the same, that women 'craved the responsibility, struggled for it, bit the policeman appointed to her [. . .] now to suffer the prick of a contrary instinct whenever fatigue lowers her spirits for activity' (*The More I See* 199–200). She dreads a future in which 'man will enjoy the fullest freedom, while woman, loaded [. . .] with the responsibilities of organising, managing, trading, providing, governing, will lament her lost leisure' (198). Although she 'does not entirely regret' transcending Victorian gender roles (202), she does feel that 'there is a time to be strong and a time to be weak [and] we must become less competent than men may become more, idle, in order to persuade them to work [because] there is such a thing as being too clever' (205). If these generally enlightened writers and Woolf, the most formidable of feminists, fell short of rejecting traditional gender ideologies, then perhaps Dane stood little chance of doing otherwise.

In fact, Dane's self-confliction embraced an awareness of her complacency, understanding that it sometimes threatened to trip her up. 'It is already such a commonplace that women should be at liberty to shape their lives as they choose', she wrote, 'that one is perhaps a little inclined to forget how amazing the change is, and to regard the legal and social disabilities under which women still labour almost as a matter of jest . . . a dangerous attitude!' (*Women's* 118). Indeed, despite her occasional predilections to regard the perspectives of patriarchal literature as historical truth, she is well capable of recognising past 'legal injustices under which [women] lived [which] caused much suffering' (16) and addresses Jane Austen directly to make this point: '*you* were classed with children and lunatics! You, if you had married, would never have managed your own money affairs! I have a notion that your husband had even a legal right to beat you!' (17). Her feminist credentials are also perhaps salvable in relation to her comments on genius. Her insistence that the 'feminine of genius [. . .] the unique quality, the supreme something, out of which, when it meets and marries genius in a man, the work of art is born' (138), for instance, acknowledges women's importance to the artistic process, that creativity is not possible without it and men cannot create independently of women's input. Counting Jane Austen among a small number of eighteenth-century 'geniuses' (*Tradition* 97), and claiming that 'on intellectual ground' woman has always 'felt herself neither superior nor inferior' (*Women's* 118), serves too to contradict the dubious essentialist claim which she also makes that gender demarcations prevent female genius. Her sense of female spiritual superiority should not be underestimated. The female wonders listed in her 'And Women' may not all have been warriors and leaders, but as enduring spirits of 'unforgotten' women (38), eternally wielding their influence over the consciousness of cultures, they compare favourably with the pitifully mortal 'seven wonders of the ancient world of men', imperialist material constructs of 'brick and ivory and gold and stone', which as she points out are inevitably destroyed and forgotten by time, so that 'gone are now the hanging gardens: forgotten the temples and the tombs. Colossus has stumbled in his stride and the still standing pyramids are defaced, defiled' (*ibid.*). She also deviates from her conjecture that genius is fundamentally unrelated to educational opportunity, by advancing social constructivism and environmental factors as the primary reason for women's absence from literary and cultural history. Alluding to the fall of Ancient Greece in order to warn her own country that choosing 'to deprive itself of half its strength' (*Women's* 119) threatens a nation with suicide, she argues: 'don't tell me that a race capable of producing a Sappho at all could not have had its women playwrights and sculptors and lawgivers had it chosen. But it did not choose. It used its physical strength to keep its women housebound' (*ibid.*).

Other seemingly conservative elements of Dane's writings deserve some reconsideration. She revisits her dismissal of women over forty as

intellectually and physically bankrupt, for instance. Advocating the cancellation of the marriage bar to allow married women to work, she argues 'to keep the modern educated woman in enforced idleness is cruelty to her and sheer waste to the community' because 'woman has at least twenty lively and intelligent years to "put in" after the cares of the nursery are over' (*Women's* 125). Her support for the overseas relocation of spinsters was made in a similarly feminist spirit: she regarded emigration as the gateway to greater life choices for the single woman unavailable in Britain – in 'larger Englands' with 'employment, single, and reasonable chances of domesticity if she desires it' (129). Opposed to attitudes which conceived emigration as a means to rid Britain of the unwanted, she defended the unmarried women 'so insultingly called "superfluous"' (127), and prejudice and discrimination against single women angered her considerably. She objected vehemently to the tide of contempt which spinsters faced: 'let the unmarried show the least discontent, the faintest trace of weariness or bitterness and "harsh envenomed virgins that can neither love nor play –" is the form of sympathetic comment dealt out to her [. . .] but if she proves that she can love, can play, by an intrigue with a man already married, is there any word too bad for her?' (128). Furthermore, her veneration of Shakespeare was less an affirmation of masculine literary tradition than a belief in his proto-feminism, evidenced in his lack of affinity with misogynistic culture, his creation of feminised heroes with a state of soul modified by emotion and events, directly opposed to the masculine Miltonic conception of character' (*Women's* 108) and his critique of Elizabethan gender relations. When Petruchio refers to his wife, Kate, as 'my goods, my chattels' in *Taming of the Shrew*, for instance, she believed, 'our greatest Englishman satirised the view of the average husband of his day' (*ibid.*). The Women's Freedom League interpreted Shakespeare's drama in this way too. Addressing one of their meetings, renowned theatre actress, producer and director, Margaret Webster, referred to 'the emancipated new woman of [his] plays', endowed with 'the essentials of womanhood without the affectations of femininity' (*The Vote* June 30 1933).¹²

Feminism has undergone considerable redefinition since the 1920s and 1930s, when it signified a different set of attitudes than it does now. Indeed, as Gill Plain puts it, 'the epithet is an unstable one, and its categories are constantly evolving' (46–7). Examining the work of Dane and her New Woman contemporaries requires careful consideration of what feminism meant during a zeitgeist in which these authors and the majority of their female readers generally believed that equal suffrage constituted the removal of 'the last great symbol of women's inequality' (H. Smith 61). Inter-war feminist political activity as a whole had splintered by this point into different groups with different beliefs and priorities, and these disparities were played out in women's writing. While equality feminists, led by Ray Strachey, believed that the pre-war suffrage struggle for equal

opportunities for women was still necessary, New Feminists brought feminism in line with post-war ideological notions of essential male and female difference, and some feminists ceased to uphold a former feminist truth that 'gender and sexuality were culturally or socially constructed' (Kent 71). This was invariably complicated by a situation in which the physical and emotional brokenness of men had considerably reduced their capacity for work and made women's participation in the work force an unwelcome necessity as much as a choice. In response to the anti-feminist back-lash, New feminists worked strategically, recommending reforms related to women's 'special concerns' such as motherhood (H. Smith 48) in order to reflect the new hegemony and attract young women to their cause. This was the method adopted by Eleanor Rathbone in her 1925 presidential address to the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in which she argued that the movement should be 'focusing on women's special contributions as mothers rather than seeking to eliminate sex role differences', not only to facilitate recruitment to feminist associations but also to 'fulfil the potentialities of their own natures' (qtd. in H. Smith 56). In opposition, in 1926, equality feminist *Time and Tide* registered its support for the alternative equality feminism agenda, emphasising the 'common humanity of men and women, not their differences', resisting the growing adoption of a separate spheres philosophy and warning of the 'dangerous insistence on women's natures' (qtd. in H. Smith 48). Equality feminism feared that by pointing to essential differences between men and women, New Feminism was in danger of inadvertently endorsing patriarchal thinking and counter-productive modes of analysis, of continuing or even deepening women's oppressions.

This vexed feminist phase was certainly exacerbated by home-front guilt and a sense of estrangement from the war-dead and the war-wounded men who lived among them. A reluctance to press for further change at this sensitive point in history undoubtedly prevented the progression of more radical feminisms. Sympathy for the war-damaged generated a change in heart in formerly strident feminists, some of whom began to advocate a reversion to traditional sex roles in the drive to rebuild family harmony, national peace and confidence as well as shattered men. As suffragist and feminist Cicely Hamilton remarked in *Time and Tide*, 'the peace in our time which we all crave will mean a reaction, more or less strong, against the independence of women' (qtd. in Kent 70). Brittain expressed this feminist dilemma, writing 'for us who cannot fight, it is a burden almost more than we can bear, to feel that we owe our safety to the lives and sight and strength' of men (qtd. in Tylee 222). Storm Jameson felt that men's war-time experience 'was incommunicable to others', and 'the gulf which divides the women of my generation and their men who fought in the War is impassable on any terms' (qtd. in Tylee 184–5). Dane felt the same reverential humility towards the nation's returned soldiers. 'When we speak of war', she wrote, 'how can women understand?'

(‘Old History’ 494), and in her review of his 1923 poem, *The Irish Guards*, she passionately defended Rudyard Kipling against critics who slated his Victorian attitudes, partly perhaps because of the poem’s unexpectedly sympathetic attitude to the Irish, but mainly in recognition of the tragic loss of his son, John, at the Battle of Loos in 1915. Reading his gruelling literary accounts of combat, she insists, ‘Mr Kipling has earned the right to hurt us if he chooses’ (ibid.). Although she abhorred patriarchal systems and masculinity, her feminism reflected post-war sensitivity to male suffering and was inclusive of men. Her hostility was not levelled at individuals of either sex and the divorce platform which she embraces in *The Women’s Side* takes into consideration the interests not just of wives, but of husbands and families as a whole, promotes her desire for ‘our country to be a country of healthy children and happy men and women’, and urges divorce as intrinsic to the ‘freedom of body and freedom of soul’ of all parties involved (110). She posits that the supremacy of the feminine ‘can of course be possible for men and women’, and writing of the ‘incessant, selfless efforts of the feminists of the last hundred years – of the feminists, male and female’ (17) she clearly acknowledges male contributions to the woman’s cause. To regard men as ‘competitor rather than companion’ would be, in her opinion, a ‘fault’ (15) and a sense of compassion and responsibility towards men runs through all of her works, fictional and non-fictional. Publishing *The Women’s Side* in the same year that numerous articles appeared in *Time and Tide* on the advantages and disadvantages of new and equality feminism, Dane entered into this gender dialogue at its height and her gender politics were inevitably sensitive to the conservatism prevalent at this point in gender history when feminism was in retreat from its earlier more radical pre-war standpoints. As one ‘well-known feminist’ recognised, ‘Dane will never write anything which is likely to offend men’ (qtd. in ‘Personalities’ 56) and within her articles and essays, careful verbal balancing acts create contradictions in her viewpoint and also in her modes of address. So young women who ‘evade responsibilities’ and have ‘not bothered to use’ their vote are duly reprimanded and handed ‘words of provocation’ (*Women’s Side* foreword n.p.), while self-deprecating and hedging strategies are also employed, such as, ‘I don’t pretend to know’ (13), disclaiming authority, professing uncertainty, avoiding stridency and controversy. Perhaps relying like her feminist contemporaries, ‘upon the same analytical framework as anti-feminists’ (Lewis qtd. in H. Smith 61), she followed the tactical lead and ‘sensible decision of feminist leaders to accommodate themselves to the prevailing political culture’ (Harrison qtd. in Kent 66). *Time and Tide* certainly identifies her as someone who was ‘sociologically feminist [. . .] who insists more on the diversity between male and female than is quite acceptable to those who find a common denominator in humanity’ (‘Personalities’ 55). This essentialist stance, highly visible in her journalism suggests that she identified foremost with New Feminist principles, which

was perhaps a factor in her disappearance from the pages of *Time and Tide*. Yet her commitment to the equalising tenets of the Six Point Group suggests an allegiance to equality feminism too.

On balance, Dane was gender-progressive, believing in the necessity for women to use their essential supremacy to create a better world by participating in it, not retreating into traditional domesticity and motherhood, and compared with the retractions of key political feminists and the rejection of feminism by many altogether in favour of the non-feminist townswomen's guilds 'which attempted to teach women how to perform their traditional roles better' (H. Smith 61), her feminist credentials stand pretty firm. Furthermore, her personal brand of feminism which acknowledged and encouraged the feminine element in both men and women, and sought to protect families, men, women and children included, rather than aggressively pit woman against man in the mould of second-wave feminism, is not inconsistent with a more inclusive twenty-first-century post-feminist perspective.

Social Ills and Liberal Solutions

Dane loved the modern world and its opportunities for women but she also valued the status quo and her comments occasionally evoke Alison Light's famous profile of the inter-war middlebrow writer as a paradoxical mixture of conservatism and modernity (10). She was not averse to praising Victorian patriarchs, whom she referred to as 'grandfathers of ours whose era has become a by-name for all that to-day despises' ('Best Sellers' 92) and her involvement in *The Guiding Book* to some degree implicates her in its patriotic ambition to 'try and show something of the traditions and the aims, the examples of great men and women and the ideals of service and loyalty that have found expression in the Guide spirit and law' (Foreword 7). In the wake of the 1926 General Strike, she feared civil unrest (*Women's*, Foreword, n.p.), she expressed an impatience with certain 'Petty Tyrannies' (*Women's* 34), including cultural obligations for 'a mistress' to 'provide her servant with a piano' (42), and having to 'cringe' to her 'new cook!' (43), and her irritation with 'moderns' for sneering at people who valued 'an exclusiveness' which she perceived as a natural inclination to gravitate towards 'people of one's own caste and creed', betrays staunchly middle-class attitudes. A sentimental imperialism is apparent in her objections to what she saw as a modern snobbery which made people 'afraid to say that they warm to the lions in Trafalgar Square', the guardians of Nelson's column which celebrate England's naval power ('What Sort of Snob' 29). Her false assumption that English national middle-class identity automatically infers a certain reticence 'our terror of logic, our poetic horror of plain speech' ('Fools' 54), a reserve, sensitivity and decorum which she problematically attributes to 'the far-off drop of Roman blood in

us that insists that a public display of personal emotion is not quite decent' ('Mother Night' 15) is rather smug, as is her association of Englishness with a 'passion for individuality and independence' (*Women's* 40). These ideologically problematic assertions are few and far between however, characteristic of an inter-war middle-class anxiously adjusting to a modernising Britain. Furthermore, aside from one or two isolated throwaway remarks related to the vagaries of servants, most probably intended to establish a sense of commonality with her reader, her plays and novels demonstrate little interest in or anxiety about the servant question; servants are conspicuously absent, and her modern heroines tend to 'do' for themselves. Moreover, her conceptualisation of English distinctness and racial types was not indicative at the time of any kind of narrow nationalism and it was shared by radical writers. In Rose Allatini's 1918 novel, *Despised and Rejected*, for instance, the sympathetic hero, Dennis Blackwood, conceptualises internationalism within an unashamed paradigm of racial difference despite the fact that he is the novel's representative of radical pacifism. He applauds 'the man who, seeing beyond hedges and frontiers and class-distinctions, claims the whole world as his "country" and claims kinship with all people who walk upon the face of it' yet sees no difficulty in stereotyping 'the steadfastness of the English and the indomitable fire of the French; the depth and the innate good-heartedness of the German people; and the easy tears and laughter of the Austrians; the Italians' hot-blooded rhetorical love of their country, and the incurable melancholy of the Irish, the Russians and the Poles' (Allatini 200).

In addition, although it may be unfashionable now, and was not radical then, to defend Victorianism, Dane was not alone amongst those who believed the nineteenth century to be more principled than the inter-war period. A tendency among twenty-first-century cultural critics to dismiss anti-modern sentiments as conservative perhaps ignores the fact that many women writers were not averse to progression but to the 1920s fashion among the young for what George Orwell called a 'passive, non-political attitude' (qtd. in Melman 146). For instance, in *Women are Like That*, a 1929 collection of short stories by E.M. Delafield, one tale, 'History Again Repeats Itself', critiques the emotional emptiness of modern values. Its heroine, who 'knew nothing about the Great War, except that middle-aged people could be very boring about it' (146), tries hard to become a tough, psychologically aware modern, but is knocked off balance by a very old-fashioned broken heart. Her happiness is restored once she re-embraces traditional values, represented by her parents' love, the local community, Christmas rituals and the kindly village vicar. Netta Syrett's novels also take issue with the same 'modernist mis-characterizations of Edwardian and Victorian traditionalism' (Ardis 135), which needled Dane. Dane's defence of Victorian figures of authority rested on her sense that they were actually more progressive than leaders of a politically

apathetic modern world and 'at least had stuff in them [. . .] the stuff of the men who made one revolution in England and another in America for principle's sake' ('Best Sellers' 92). As an antidote to modern cynicism, she promotes the preservation of certain pre-war values as conducive to the kind of independence, courage and integrity necessary to rebuild the world in line with egalitarian principles. The modern generation rejected discipline because of its associations with dominant modes of control and restraint, recently held to account by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*, which critiques the institutional instruments of 'panoptic surveillance' used by Western societies to 'shape, train and normalise individuals' (Leitch 1471). Dane certainly grasped that coercive discipline could send 'the characterless back to the button-moulder' and to a mindless mechanised existence ('Best Sellers' 65), but felt that self-discipline, an equally unfashionable quality in the 1920s, was a desirable trait that enabled the free-spirited to grow, 'trains the free and strong to be freer and stronger than they were before' (ibid.). Indeed, despite her antipathy towards certain kinds of irresponsible moderns, young people as a whole won her enthusiastic approval and she hankered after their spirited approach to life. 'Born [. . .] into this extremely muddled world they have been expected to do a more difficult job than any of their predecessors and they are doing it wonderfully well', she stated, adding 'frankly I envy them' (*Oakland Tribune* Sept 4 1932). Alexander Woolcott, 'perhaps the most influential critic of the day' (Barrow 29), testifies to her optimistic view of the modern world. Complimenting her first play, *Bill of Divorcement* (1921), he enthuses, 'here at last is a play that makes authentic recognition of the quality of the generation that is knocking at our doors. The youngsters of today, the boys and girls of between fifteen and eighteen, have been scolded in many a scene and story for their disturbing manners, have been bewailed and blushed at enough for their goings-on. Here is the first playwright who has seen [. . .] that these newcomers are abler, keener, more honest and more courageous than we were and in them lies all our hope for a better world' (qtd. in Barrow 29). Her feminism and modernity combined to make her a 'staunch defender of modern women' (*Oakland Tribune* Sept 4, 1932), and she was angered by the pervasive 'abuse' that they were subjected to in the press (ibid.). Indeed, her affinity with pre-war culture only went as far as a faith in liberal nineteenth-century social-reform policies, Victorian political energy and courage and New-womanism; she rejected its repressive patriarchal elements. Once asked for a message to give to modern women, she replied 'I would rather be living in the day woman ran her own show – and hated belonging to the generation when she was a mere chattel!' (ibid.). She shared Trollope's distaste for the 'greyness of Victorian virtue . . . the aridity of the life of the middle-class, middle-aged Victorian woman [. . .] and the pretentious cold-bloodedness of the middle-class, mid-Victorian male' ('Trollope' 166).

Abhorring 'political and social apathy', she was 'ardently convinced that a cure must be found for the public and private ills which afflict humanity' ('Personalities' 56). Her sympathies extended beyond women of her own class to 'the rank and file' (*Women's* 122), who variously did their own housework, prepared the family meals, made the clothes (ibid.), attended polytechnic rather than university, took on the role of the 'woman teacher and the woman clerk', who contributed so much to modern women's freedoms (ibid.) and became nurses suffering under the 'petty tyranny' of medical authorities who refused to permit them to shingle their hair (34). She protested at injustices meted out to working class women subjected to draconian state assistance policies which meant 'an ailing servant is told that she cannot get on the panel unless she goes to bed' (42). She embraced socialist-identified ideologies, suggesting 'the problems of the married with families should be the affair of a government, not of an employer', arguing for a system in which 'the special burden of the married should be eased by low taxation, and that people who have no dependents should contribute more to the state' ('Fair Play and Fair Pay' *Daily Herald* March 20 1941 7). Her ideas anticipate present-day government regulatory and intervention processes which provide child benefit and child tax credits, systems continually under threat by conservative administrations. Committed to improving the lives of disadvantaged women, she supported the Cecil Houses, a charity organised and managed by women which provided homes or hostels for stranded women, from which she had personally benefitted when she was an impoverished and sometimes temporarily homeless young actress.¹³ According to Barrow, she wrote a class-conscious play *Gooseberry Fool* (1929), about 'the trivial behaviour of the upper classes at play and the commonsense of the working man' (61). Moreover, firmly opposed to the elitist opinion that high culture was the domain of the upper-middle classes, she joined forces with some of her middlebrow peers, lending her voice to a fundraising appeal made in *The Times* to establish The Workers' Library Society 'Libraries in Factories', which aimed to introduce books in the 'factory, workshop, and place where workers congregate' ('The Workers' Library Society "Libraries in Factories"' 12). The appeal's standpoint, that 'if the world owes a greater debt to literature than to any other of life's activities, literature in turn has an obligation to fulfil' (ibid.), is perhaps a somewhat naive and grandiose claim for the role and function of literature and certainly at odds with Marxist literary-critical exposés of liberal agendas for cultural improvement as bourgeois, dubious, ineffectual and woefully inadequate. However, by recognising that 'lending libraries are for those who can afford the subscription and the time to go to them: free libraries are not often easily accessible to the worker after his daily task' (ibid.), The Workers' Library Society 'Libraries in Factories' demonstrated a clear understanding of the reality of working life, and the venture can be applauded for its economic

hopes: to raise the standard of living of the working classes by creating, through literacy 'greater chances of employment' (ibid.).

Reforming the penal system to focus on the rehabilitation of offenders and put an end to the death penalty was another of Dane's liberal enthusiasms. 'I will not endure the thought', she wrote, 'that a vote of mine is cutting off the chance of reformation from a fellow-creature, whatever his crime' (*Women's* 51) and she makes her case against capital punishment in 'The Valiant Little Tailor'. By appropriating the title of a fairy tale by the Grimm brothers, she signifies her ironic translation of the original narrative of magical empowerment into a grimly realist political text. In her version, the true account of an eighteenth-century tailor whose 'pathetic history, reduced to three lines, can be read in a history of St. Clement Danes parish' (*Fate Cries Out*, Preface ix), the Grim(m) tale is transformed into the tragedy of a hardworking tailor who ends up at the gallows. Working eighteen hours a day to keep his family, he refuses food brought home from the market by his nine children if it is not 'the reward of odd jobs or errands honestly run' ('Valiant' 22). Never in receipt of a pay rise, he takes his one chance to avoid a fall into poverty by selling clothes which he produces from a remnant of material gifted by his master, who subsequently accuses him of stealing the fabric. Arrested for the crime and sentenced to death, during the build up to the execution he divides his time between consoling his cell mate, a fifteen-year-old boy condemned to hang for borrowing 'his uncle's repeater [watch] because he slept heavy and got beaten if he was late' (36–37), and busily stitching mourning clothes for his own family from black cloth donated by sympathetic neighbours. Moments before he goes to the scaffold, he is comforted by the sight of his family 'all dressed in the mourning suits that he himself had made' (45), and strangely cheered that, 'nobody could say that Charlie Knuckney had not left his family respectable, even to their shoes, even to handkerchiefs' (45–46). The narrative is enlightened by a class consciousness which echoes Wells' left-wing 1910 novel *The History of Mr Polly*, with its 'quietly expressed outrage about [. . .] wasted lives; and [. . .] will to argue that these lives are as valuable as anyone else's' (Robins 55). Indeed, compared with Wells' predisposition for 'fantasy-endings over grimly realistic ones' and his 'qualified optimism for a better world' (ibid.), Dane's realist conclusion appears the more pessimistic, and counter-cultural in this respect.

Dane's sobering tale cannot be regarded as merely historical. Given that capital punishment was still in place in 1930s Britain, it was topical and pertinent and reflected her strong opposition to the practice, which she iterated in a chapter in *The Women's Side* entitled 'Women Voters and the Death Penalty'. In it she makes a powerful case for its abolition, rhetorising, 'can anyone consider those last hours of a murderer's life without feeling sick?' (46) and employing arguments that are still used against its reintroduction today: 'instinctive repulsion' (45) against the distasteful

'parade of the gallows' (47), the moral dubiousness of eliminating transgressors as a matter of expediency, the sense that two wrongs don't make a right, and the absence of any evidence that execution provides any kind of deterrent. She refers to the practice of progressive countries to make her point, citing nobel prize-winning poet and novelist, Anatole France, who wrote that 'most European nations have now abolished the death penalty and in such countries crime is no more common than in the nations where this base custom exists' (48). She opposes pro-death penalty arguments that abolitionists are guilty of excessive sentimentality by deploying more antiquated authorities, Shakespeare and the New Testament, defending 'the quality of mercy' on the grounds that 'Christ said it' and 'it is the sentimentality of Shakespeare', ventriloquised in Isabella's speeches to Angelo in *Measure for Measure* (47). She regarded the execution of women as particularly 'indecent' (46) and was particularly troubled by the hangings of Mary Ann Ansell in 1899 and Edith Thompson in 1923.¹⁴ Other writers of her time shared her anxiety over the problematic conviction of Thompson. In 1924, Delafield wrote a novel based on the tragic story, *Messalina of the Suburbs*, and the outrage expressed within was echoed by Cicely Hamilton, who was similarly appalled by 'the unhealthy morbid excitement which is created amongst a section of the public' by the death penalty (qtd. in Bland 646). The case continues to sit uneasily with contemporary feminist cultural critics including Lucy Bland who has recently re-examined and re-evaluated the part that media misogyny and anti-feminist hegemony played in this now famous miscarriage of justice (624–48). Dane foreshadowed Bland's theory in a 1925 article praising *Messalina* as an important 'book to read and study' to arm the reader against media hype 'when the newspapers [are] filled with the hysterical and morbid headlines that so easily destroy decency and compassion alike' ('Family' 152–3). Reiterating this point in *The Women's Side*, she conveys the same message as Bland using older inter-war registers and turns of phrase: that Thompson was found guilty because of her 'unwomanly' sexuality and the media propaganda which whipped this up into public excitement and frenzy: that 'because she was young, beautiful, because it was possible to treat the sordid story as an echo of the old great stories of disastrous passion, but above all because she was a woman, her trial and execution were accompanied by a wave of excitement that was slow to subside' (44).

Although primarily an anti-capital punishment text, 'The Valiant Little Tailor' perhaps also signals the sentence of death pronounced on millions of combatants in the Great War whose hegemonic faith in the validity of social rank engendered compliance with expected social behaviour, giving them false consolations and preventing their questioning grand metanarratives. Dane openly critiqued 'the war that nobody wanted, that nobody willed [. . .] that spelt ruin to all the little lives' ('Tomorrow's' 142) and her sense of national pride was equivocal and decidedly fragile. Obligated to conform to the conservative editorial agenda of *The Guiding Book*,

The Women's Side provided her with the political space to freely debunk distasteful elements of national political culture. In this text and in press articles, she interrogates English imperialism and its role in orchestrating the calamities of the war and the disastrous international reconstructions in its aftermath, contradicting her occasional more patriotic remarks. In her review of *A Passage to India* (1924), for instance, she refers to 'the vicious caste instinct' and nationalism 'easily enough degraded into a tyranny' ('Some Translations' 188). She applauds Forster's late-Victorian doubts about the validity of colonialism and his probing of the nature of imperialism, and praises his modernist uncertainty and eschewal of falsely optimistic closures: 'What are we doing in India?', she writes, 'Why are we doing it? Ought we to be doing it? If not, why not? [. . .] all the nineteenth-century in Mr Forster has gone to the posing of these problems [but the] twentieth-century in him characteristically refuses to solve them for us' ('Best Sellers' 94). She admires his effortless balance of anti-colonial sentiments and the demands of a post-war readership alienated by political rhetoric, the ability of his novel to 'satisfy the most fastidious of moderns, so depressed, so detached is it in its attitude to the Anglo-Saxon universe' (ibid.). She particularly respected Woodrow Wilson's idealistic aspiration to achieve peace and social justice through a policy of allied leniency towards the defeated Axis powers. Wilson's death in 1924 was received by many with liberal inclinations, including H.G. Wells,⁶ as the tragedy of 'a visionary victimized by the personal animosities and political ambitions of his critics' (Hogan 375) and Dane was certainly of this conviction. By 1926, national grief had receded enough to enable an outpouring of literature which sharply condemned the Great War (Hynes 418), a 'prominence of satirical prose works presenting the War as essentially a futile waste of life inflicted upon the young by the obtuse or malevolent Old Men' (Baldick 342); Dane's contribution was her 1928 drama, *Adam's Opera*, a 'social satire in the form of a fairytale' (*Daily Telegraph*, qtd. in Barrow 57). The play's politics reflect the general feeling in progressive literary circles that 'the world of war and the world after had become mirrors of each other' (Hynes 343), prompting creative confluences of the tragedy of war with the 'emotionally exhausted, self-centred, unfeeling' twenties (293). Informed by the nihilistic outlook of modernist literature, that 'the world after the war was a ruined place, where dishonourable forces had triumphed, and the war's good men had been defeated and ignored' (352), *Adam's Opera* catechises institutional failures to embrace Wilson's innovative spirit of internationalism. In its provocative preface, Dane laments the 'pure tragedy' of Wilson's death (xiv), the ensuing loss of League momentum, and the disastrous consequences of ignoring his vision of peace:

The tragedy lay in the fact that five years had elapsed since [his] words were spoken, and that within that short time almost every

prophesy that the speaker had made had been falsified, every aspiration nullified, every item of his confession of faith contradicted by the object of his service and his worship. His country had, in every particular, gone counter to the assertions made on her behalf.

(ibid)

Within the play, Wilson metamorphoses into Adam, a fictional archetype of the saviour-deliverer, a tragic hero whose name references the Fall in the Book of Genesis and also Milton's seventeenth-century biblical adaptation, *Paradise Lost*, in which original man is allowed a glimpse of the future of humankind. A strange sardonic combination of spectacle, farce, musical and tragedy, Dane's drama is a version of 'Sleeping Beauty' saturated with modern cultural references. Adam enters the palace domain to bring peace to a war-torn principality and create a permanent peace and a world without frontiers and tariffs. To achieve this, his task is to raise public consciousness of the values of truth and beauty, represented by the palace princess, by rousing her from her slumber and keeping her awake, as without her presence in court to remind them of what is important, the populace will lapse into a state of anti-Versailles apathy and ignorance. Tragically, like post-war Europe and America, the princess falls back to sleep and Adam's mission fails. Pursuing an isolationist course to keep foreigners out of their land, the people betray their deliverer and stone him to death. Dane's symbolisation of the transformation of public consciousness into unconsciousness, encouraged by the powerful institutions who manipulate the people to sleep their way through life, foreshadows 1930s political poetry which utilised metaphors of sleeping and dreaming to warn readers of the terrible consequences of hiding from responsibility during the rise of Nazism.¹⁵

Adrian Bingham argues that there were a 'variety of different gendered discourses' articulated in the inter-war popular press and although opposing viewpoints were often expressed within the same newspaper and there was sometimes an overlap between right- and left-wing newspapers in relation to modern gender roles, there was a clear general divergence of opinion on most issues between the conservative *Daily Express* and the liberal *Daily Herald* and *Daily News* (6–7). Dane's internationalist spirit was the antithesis of the jingoism of the conservative press, and the *Daily Express* in particular, which upheld ideologies of empire, sought to 'buttress traditional male virtues' (192), praised manliness and military service against what they perceived to be the growing threat of effeminacy amongst men and utterly derided the League of Nations. Her views on these issues aligned her with the liberal press, who rejected imperialist and masculinist attitudes, sympathised with impoverished returning soldiers, recognised kinship with the defeated Germans and consistently regarded the enfranchisement of all women as important to world peace (ibid.). Her perspectives on women also situate her within

liberal inter-war frameworks of thought. While conservative newspapers re-evaluated women's role only 'within strict limits' (21), feared what they perceived as a female invasion of male spheres, venerated the institution of marriage and the traditional role of housewife and mother which they elevated to the status of a profession, and projected an image of woman as 'decoration for the male gaze' (20), the liberal press championed compatibility in marriage, emphasised the need for men to become more aware of the emotional needs of their wives and children, were more active than their conservative rivals in encouraging women to exercise their vote and tentatively welcomed assertive models of modern womanhood as improving on older cultural images of dutiful housewives, mothers and glamorous companions. Liberal newspapers published articles pressing for the right of married women to work by feminists such as Ray Strachey, Lady Rhonnda and Delafield (68). Evaluating Dane's feminist perspectives in relation to the gender ideologies generated by these newspapers, it seems she was either in accordance with the liberal press or inclined towards a more radical outlook. While the liberal press habitually ignored the injustices of the newly imposed marriage bar, unequal pay and the treatment of female teachers for instance, Dane supported these causes, and she did not share the liberal papers' enduring anxiety that the traditional breadwinner model was under threat.

Contemporary cultural critics are in the process of extricating inter-war literary realism from its vexed alliance with dominant ideology, repositioning it as a crucial and valid medium for feminist literary discourses (Felski qtd. in Ardis 124). Early and mid-twentieth-century claims for the supremacy of modernism are being challenged and benchmarks of literary quality redefined to identify 'radical politics' in branches of female middlebrow writing that counter the conservatism of male-authored modernist texts (Schenck qtd. in Ardis 125). Dane's work, yet to be validated as a legitimate voice of modernising womanhood in inter-war Britain, demonstrates that middlebrow texts are not necessarily as conformist, or similar in ilk, type and kind, particularly in relation to liberal politics, as those in the modernist camp presume. Her texts transition the questionable boundaries that have categorised high, low and middlebrow texts. She can perhaps be best described as a champion of tolerance and individuality with a respect for tradition, whose middle-class perspective prevented her from giving her all to protest against the inequalities of the class system, but which enabled her to develop a certain zeal for social justice. Her anti-militaristic perspective on the Great War may not have been unusually radical or inconsistent with a generalised 1920s and early 1930s war-weariness, and admittedly her abhorrence of capital punishment was shared with Alison Light's principal conservative modernists, including Agatha Christie. What is counter-cultural, however, is her anti-patriarchal inclinations: her internationalism, her sensitivity to marginalised groups, and her strong agenda for female empowerment. It would

not be fair to group her with conservative modernists, therefore, or with the kind of middlebrow writers condemned by Woolf for instrumenting social control in thinly veiled social conduct narratives intended to comfort and entertain sleeping audiences. Her gender politics were perhaps more obviously stridently progressive than her convictions relating to social issues, but where social and gender issues converge in her writing, she is undoubtedly radical. The challenges posed in her journalism are designed to wake the reader from sleep or verify the beliefs of an already alert audience and this impetus extends to her dramas, novels and short stories.

Notes

1. DiCenzo contends that while many inter-war feminist theatre practitioners were not writing a (modernist etc) the modernist aesthetic, they were modern nevertheless, in their ideas and attitudes. Ann Ardis concurs, defending non-modernist texts as equally valid in their representation of the modern world and importance to literary history as canonised modernist works. Reinterpreting modernism as an aggressive force, the politically-driven victor in a competition for the ‘“art [that] will go forward” into canonicity’ (115), she views it as merely one of multiple literary forms which aimed to make it new and represent post First-World-War culture and sensibilities. Ruth Robins too regards middlebrow writers as equally capable of representing the modern human psychological condition as the modernists who have claimed the topic as their own. She believes that non-modernist texts have only been relegated on account of a literary establishment-driven early-twentieth-century antipathy to narrative clarity, and preference for aesthetic obscurity (55). Other contemporary critical paradigms question the cogency of existing methods of categorisation by collapsing the distinction between middlebrow and modernist. Ignoring the modernist referent completely, Baldick illuminates the ways in which the inter-war novel adopted a variety of literary methods, often adapting those modernist techniques which ‘represented the activities of the mind . . . to enhance the psychological dimensions of realist novels or even of genre fiction’ (211). He points out that while academic commentators have divided literature ‘cleanly’ (5) into either experimental artistry or traditional realism, the ‘modern movement’ actually constituted a ‘broad church that embraced a variety of forms, techniques, styles, and attitudes, all of which were in some way innovative and in some way representative of new twentieth-century modes of awareness’ (ibid.). In his account of the development of modern literature, he groups texts usually classed as modernist together with those which are widely regarded as middlebrow, including ‘realist novelists’ (4), Bennett, Wells, Maugham, John Galsworthy, and Hugh Walpole, all of whom, at their time of publication were scorned by Woolf in her 1925 essay, ‘Modern Fiction’, a condemnation of materialist novels. Lynne Hapgood and Nancy Paxton read realism and modernism not as conflicting literary movements, but as different literary techniques, which often coexist within the same text to speak to and of the modern social context (Ardis 116). The term modernism has recently been reformulated and divided into subcategories, including ‘intermodernism’ to describe ‘politically radical’ texts which use non-canonical forms and genres to ‘represent working-class and working middle-class cultures’ (Blumel 1).

2. Inaugurated in 1929, other members included Hugh Walpole and J.B. Priestley.
3. Apemantus admonishes Timon thus: 'the middle of humanity thou never knewest, but the extremity of both ends' (Shakespeare). This symbolises Shakespeare's own sense that he had too often ignored the needs and requirements of his audience.
4. She frames *Tradition and Hugh Walpole* with quotations from Walpole's 1926 text, *Reading, an Essay*, which outlines his philosophy of literary compromise: 'art cannot separate itself from the past, but must build on it, in grafting the experience, modes and novelties of its own immediate time, the body of art that has proceeded' (Walpole qtd in *Tradition* n.p.) and 'a nation that is bound by its tradition is dead [. . .] a nation that despises its tradition is damned; but a nation that uses its traditions and adds to its traditions has, in life as in literature, the future of the world in the hand' (qtd. in *Tradition* 263).
5. An advertisement appeared in *The Vote* for a meeting of the Six Point Group on March 14 1922 and Dane was the first speaker listed (Mar 10 1922).
6. The original objectives or 'objects' of *The Vote* were specified in the paper on November 4th 1911. These were 'to secure for women the Parliamentary vote as it is or may be granted to men; to use the powers thus obtained to establish equality of rights and opportunities between the sexes, and to promote the social and industrial well-being of the community'. Following the implementation of universal female franchise, a revised statement of the paper's objectives was issued as 'Objects' 1930: 'to use the power of the Parliamentary vote, now 14 Women on equal terms with men, to elect women to Parliament, and upon other public bodies; to establish equality of rights and opportunities between the sexes: and to promote the social and industrial well-being of the community' (Sept 5 1930).
7. The full list comprises: Cleopatra, Semiramis, Agrippina, Boadicea, Judith, Deborah, Kriemhild, the Medici women, the Tudor women, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Christina of Sweden, Joan of Arc, St. Catherine, St Theresa, St. Clare, Russian Catherine, Florence Nightingale, the Empress Dowager of China, Theodora the Dancer, Queen Victoria and Madame Curie. (*Women's* 135).
8. I am quoting from the American version unless indicated otherwise.
9. Reviewing a text related to social problems in Britain, *The Vote* registered a feminist anger about child abuse and cited in evidence Dane's account of how in eight court cases of men 'who did unspeakable things to little girls', all of the offenders received light sentences (Apr 29 1921).
10. In 1923, French and Belgian armies began a two-year allegedly brutal occupation of this part of Germany, exacerbating the hostility which vanquished Axis peoples felt towards the allied war victors.
11. *The Vote* ran an editorial on July 25th 1930 supporting Lord Cecil's defence of women's right to sit in the House of Parliament against MPs who argued they were less able to cope with the strain of politics than men (Jul 25 1930). In a 1926 article the paper called attention to the reported view that women would not be equal to the physical strain of serving at a big banquet at the Guildhall at which 'wines and courses have to be carried considerable distances, and up and down' (Dec 3 1926). The paper also regretted the decision made by the BBC to employ only male announcers on the grounds that women are physically and temperamentally less suitable than men to bear the heavy physical strain imposed by the job (Sept 24 1926). It was similarly unhappy when Birmingham General Hospital imposed a marriage bar on women doctors, arguing that 'no woman should have to expose herself to the strain of combining work and domesticity' (Mar 28 1930).

12. Margaret Webster made the address on behalf of her mother, Dame May Whitty, significantly one of the two English actresses to first be awarded a Dame hood, and during the same Women's Freedom League meeting, one Dr Knight acknowledged the League's interest in 'the work of the old Vic' theatre, long associated with Shakespearian production, before introducing its manager, Lilian Baylis, also the manager of Sadler's Wells, to speak of the delights of performing the Bard's works. Bayliss declared, 'we're never lonely if we have our Bible and our Shakespeare' (*The Vote* Nov 13 1931).
13. *The Vote* reports on a meeting to raise money for the fourth Cecil Home, at which Dane was the second speaker. Dane tells how when touring as an actress she was often stranded and took refuge in one of the homes, where much kindness was shown to her (Nov 29 1929). She repeats this story the same week in the *Daily Herald*, praising the home for offering her a bed when her booked room was 'occupied by two drunken women' (Nov 23 1929). *The Vote* ran an extended article on the founding of the organisation (Oct 30 1926). After spending two weeks on the streets of London in the early 1920s, 'so that she could understand what it would feel like to be a woman, homeless and alone', Frances Chesterton wrote a book about the experience, *In Darkest London*, 'recounting her stories with deep emotion' and describing how 'she made her experiences count – by taking action'. On October 21st 1926, she held a meeting at 25 Park Lane at which she explained how 'the municipalities refuse to run women's public lodging houses on the grounds that women are difficult to manage, and the provision of clean beds and hot water might be held to subsidise immorality'. Her husband, G.K. Chesterton called this a statement of 'horrible and loathsome hypocrisy'. *The Vote* writes how 'on the evening of that first meeting, Mrs Chesterton's passion and belief was persuasive and engaging. Her proposal was met with enthusiasm and support and Cecil Houses was formed'. In this very building and through other events, Frances Chesterton raised her £5,000 [and] as a result, in March 1927, the first Cecil House opened its doors to 44 women and 2 babies. Following *The Vote's* account, less than a year later the second Cecil Home opened in Kings Cross, in 1929, the third was established and the fourth which Dane campaigned for, opened in 1930. Another was inaugurated in 1934, and the organisation became a registered Housing Association in 1974.
14. Ansell's case sparked an unsuccessful petition signed by one hundred MPs, requesting that the defendant's life be spared partly because of her perceived lack of mental capacity but also because of her sex.
15. In *Newsreel*, for instance, Cecil Day-Lewis despairs of a general abnegation of responsibility, as the populace are effectively lured to sleep by the new cinema media:

Enter the dream-house, brothers and sisters, leaving
Your debts asleep, your history at the door:
This is the home for heroes, and this loving
Darkness a fur you can afford.
(Day-Lewis 68)

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2 Women's Themes in Inter-War Drama

During the second half of the twentieth century, the work of British inter-war women dramatists was often disdained by literary critics as meriting little literary or cultural importance. Their plays were derided as too middlebrow, middle class, cosily conformist, and overly constrained by the conservative conventions of domestic comedy, melodrama, and of the well-made play genre, criticised for its 'subordination of psychological accuracy or social themes to a purely structural logic' which rebutted experimentation (Innes 11). In the last three decades, critical practitioners have begun to rescue female dramatists from these negative assessments. Maggie B. Gale was among the first to argue that they deserve to be taken seriously on account of their tenacity, in relation to the proliferation of their output, the impressive length of their performance runs and how, notwithstanding their use of realist traditional forms, they 'infiltrated and integrated with a dominant form of theatre' (*West* 4) to raise important gender-political issues (11 18 107). Differentiating between contemporary and inter-war feminism, she avoids the term 'feminism' with its implication of 'specific political struggle' (59), preferring 'feminisms' (*ibid.*) to describe female-authored plays with some feminist authority, which generated female perspectives, 'centre[d] their narratives on the "woman question" (6) and focussed on themes of 'women and work, the family, mothering and the "female condition"' '(3). Rebecca D'Monté and Rebecca Cameron have verified and extended Gale's research, but their re-evaluations of inter-war women playwrights have brought to light the tentative and prevaricating nature of their feminist impulses, how they vacillate between political reticence and forward-looking feminist tendencies, expressed through ambiguous messages. While they 'continue to submit to traditional, even misogynist, conceptions of femininity' (Cameron 'Limits' 126), valorising romantic expectations, advocating womanly qualities of duty to husband, family and country and exempting male behaviours and traditional family structures from criticism, they also recognise the 'potential for empowerment' and 'forging a different future' (D'Monté 'Gender' 2). Cameron specifically argues that their texts are not un-progressive, but rather wary, honest, realistic. She perceives a shift

in perspective after 1918 from self-assurance to a wavering of confidence in response to their gradual enlightenment as to the workings of patriarchal ideology, a developing recognition that in spite of women's inroads to counter 'the external social and political structures of equality' which the vote had partly ameliorated, 'internalised ideological barriers to women's self-determination' still prevailed ('Limits' 111). She argues that because gaining the vote created only limited emancipations for women, their post-suffrage dramas are marked by disappointment and reversions from a strident Edwardian optimism to a more pessimistic outlook, which is reflected in representations of dramatic female protagonists back in traditional dutiful roles. In the interests of authenticity then, inter-war heroines were 'rarely strong, rebellious, or independent' but inclined to accept subservience as their portion (110). She does credit them with some counter-hegemonic viewpoints, however, expressed through ideological spaces in their plays between plots with subordinated heroines and authorial positions which lament their conciliatory behaviours.

According to Gale's assessment that fifty-one performances on the London stage was a measure of success (*West* 11), then the majority of Dane's plays were winners, meeting or exceeding this number, and of those written between 1921 and 1938, fourteen were successfully produced in the West End. A significant dramatist in her own time, she is an obvious candidate for critical reappraisal but only a few of her plays have undergone re-evaluation and her dramatic work as a whole, and with it her significant contribution to the gender-dialogue of the inter-war theatrical zeitgeist, has been largely overlooked. The importance of her dramatic work has recently started to receive acknowledgement, by Gale in particular, who counts her among those playwrights whose productions 'theatre historians have failed to validate' ('Women' 27) and includes her among her examples of women whose plays actively interchanged with a cultural context in a process of negotiating the meaning of 'woman': dramas which 'sustained' the 'woman question' in 'centre-stage position' (*ibid.*), providing solid, expanded roles for women, 'larger female casts, plots centred round female heroines, [and] woman as subject rather than object' (24). Of particular importance to theatre history is the range of her play writing and its operation at the interface of diverse dramatic forms, creating the kind of 'synergies between "political" and "commercial" material, and "avant-garde" and "mainstream"' aesthetics which D'Monté identifies at the most gender-progressive end of the theatrical spectrum ('Drama' 184).¹ Her dramas repudiate sentimentality, engage often in modernist experimentations, and according to Gale, she is one of a trilogy of writers with a modern tendency to 'place a heavy significance on social and environmental causes of sexual difference', the other two writers being G.B. Stern and Aimée Stuart ('Errant' 121). Indeed, through exceptional women characters whose qualities of courage, stamina, purpose and

moral integrity surpass the weaknesses of male protagonists, her plays centralise the importance of environmental factors to gender identity formations, particularly the First World War. As Sandra Gilbert explains, the war was an 'apocalyptic turning point in the battle of the sexes' (201) which deepened gender demarcations while paradoxically enabling women to assume more power in the home so 'while men were now invalid and maybe in-valid, their sisters were triumphant survivors and destined inheritors' (209). Whereas in Dane's fictionalised bygone contexts male characters wield tyrannical power and are upheld and protected by phallogentric institutions, they are diminished, powerless and pitiable figures in her modern-world dramas largely on account of physical, mental and emotional debilitations resulting from First World War trauma and the economic stringencies of the post-war aftermath. Shaped by the tentative and equivocal modes of feminism which evolved in consequence of the war, her model women protect and support their weaker menfolk while simultaneously forging their own advancement. The war informs women's drama in other ways. D'Monté observes in the work of many female dramatists, a 'disjunct between the younger and older generations [. . .] between women who remember and women who have forgotten the war', imaginatively realised through three distinct female types, hostile towards each other because of their different experiences of the conflict: 'the older woman who had had first-hand experience of the war, the ones who were young, but still affected by it, and those who believed that it represented the dim and distant past, something to be quickly forgotten' ('Gender' 2 8). Stereotyped matriarchs and spinsters are endemic in female-authored inter-war drama. Older single women are unsympathetically classed as sexless, tweed-attired, prudish, frigid, cold and disapproving, either family irritants with empty lives, often a "barrel of fun" serving to "fill in" to the main plot for moments of comic relief' (Gale, *West* 175), or 'unhinged' given to neurosis or even 'psychosis' (D'Monté 'Passion' 4, 12). The younger single woman, living in fear of becoming an old maid, is often epitomised as a new type of miserable single secretary, yearning for marriage, usually to her employer, 'a hovering background presence in the middle-class professional family' (Gale *West* 176). In opposition, Dane's spinsters are generally not unhappy and never laughable or psychologically deviant, and her dramas feature no simpering heroines, desperate for men. Her plays adopt a more feminist model of female harmony with female protagonists transcending the generation gap to work together to nurture and support each other, manage men, and manipulate patriarchal structures. True to her inter-war brand of feminist politics, her plays champion the rights of women but depend on a steady sense of old-fashioned morality, and she envisages progressive women as combining self-determination with an understanding and respect for the past. Although she was certainly dismayed by certain elements of D'Monté's third category of post-First-World-War

womanhood, the 'flapper', widely perceived as casual, brittle, 'infantile but precocious' (Melman 1), she vehemently championed young women as a whole, constructing models of right thinking young womanhood, humourful but compassionate and serious, without shallow opinions, deeply affected and touched by the war and raised by it into a maturity of consciousness. Indeed, arguably signifying 'little more than a young, unmarried woman with an income of some sort' (ibid.), the responsible flapper fired Dane's enthusiasm and provided models for her exceptional heroines. This mixing of serious issues with modern essence permeates her work as a whole and sincere and genuine female dramatic persona, distinct from the flapper stereotype, are the order of the day. Where she differentiates between generations of women 'as a means of opposing one ideology with another' (Gale West 175), this works to demonstrate positive cultural changes in an era of new opportunities for young women unavailable to their culturally stranded mothers.

Women in the Modern World

Judged against Maggie Gale's fifty-one performance benchmark, with a run of four hundred and nine shows, Dane's first play, *A Bill of Divorcement* (1921), was a triumph. Faring equally well in America, it catapulted actress Katherine Cornell to stardom, and following the stage successes Hollywood's illustrious RKO director, David Selznick, began 'clamouring for the film rights' (Barrow 9). The drama hit the silver screen in 1922 and was re-made: in 1932, providing Katharine Hepburn with her debut role, and again in 1940. The play is set in the recent past – 1911- and imagines a future of easier divorces. Hilary Fairfield, an unstable husband and father, returns after a long period in a mental institution to his estranged wife, Margaret, who is in the process of planning a second marriage. The bride-to-be is only spared having to resume marital relations with her unwanted former spouse by her daughter's offer to take on her father, to effectively replace her as his primary carer, freeing her to re-marry. Commentators on the opening performance at St. Martin's theatre, where it 'sent a critical first night audience into ecstasies of enthusiasm and ended with the most vociferous call for the author that has been heard in an English theatre for many years' (*Salt Lake City Deseret News* April 23, 1921), were overwhelmingly positive about Dane's poignant treatment of the play's issues. Ervine, *The Observer's* theatre critic, enthused: 'indeed Miss Dane can write a play [. . .] the curtain descended amidst such applause as has rarely been heard in the London theatre [. . .] it is a remarkable first play' (qtd. in Barrow 9), and he praised the play's realism or 'piece of life' qualities, its avoidance of melodrama and handling of a serious and painful subject with sensitivity and conviction (ibid.). Alexander Woollcott called it a 'vivid and deeply moving tragedy' and George Bernard Shaw commended its edginess, that it was 'as uncomfortable

as its author might have wished' (qtd. in Barrow 34). Allardyce Nicholl called it a 'strong' play (435) which successfully injects a modern theme into the traditional 'play of ideas' genre (434) and thirty years later J.C. Trewin admired its 'conflict between real people', and its refusal to pander to either the inter-war penchant for didactic plays or the fashion for farces, declaring it was 'not simply hectoring melodrama' because it continued to '“fix a stage” long after the furore over divorce reform was forgotten' (128). Contemporary critical appraisals of *A Bill of Divorcement* are more closely tied to debates about feminism. Gale notes how it established Dane's reputation as 'a dangerously inflammatory playwright, who might convert uneducated classes of women to a new radical politics' (*Daily Express* 'Obituary' qtd. in Gale 'Many Masks' 50) and she situates the drama within an 'emerging tradition of polemical plays by women playwrights' in this period (51). Cameron applauds the play's 'feminist perspectives', and considers Dane 'of interest' on account of her 'departure from the conventional comic-romantic structure shaping so many representations of marriage and even divorce in British Drama before World War II' ('Irreconcilable' 476). She sees this manifested in the play's ambivalent closure, which, antithetical to the generic sugar-coated ending of the normative romantic comedy, 'mov[es] beyond the sentimental resolution of the romance plot to a more sombre conclusion' (483). D'Monté asserts that it shows particular willingness to call attention to the patriarchal status quo, in that in it 'the problems caused by outmoded conventions are [. . .] challenged' ('Gender' 7) and how by locating it in the 1930s, Dane far-sightedly envisages 'how the social and political changes already occurring for women were [. . .] part of a continuum that would revolutionize women's lives in the future' ('Drama' 191). Yet all three of these critics also conceive the play's relationship with feminism as vexed, invested with an underlying conservatism which undermines its progressive argument to extend women's divorce entitlement. Cameron cites the play to support her theory that inter-war women's drama was generally unhelpful to feminist advancement because of its circumspect gender politics. She accuses Dane of a reactionary eugenicist obsession with the health of the race, arguing that Sydney is made to remain single so as to safeguard against transmitting mental abnormalities, which it is assumed she has inherited from her father, to the next generation. Condemning Sydney's ultimate capitulation to duty and renunciation of self, she contends that the play ranks with those which disrupt the impetus for narratives of emancipation that permeated feminist discourse in the decades preceding the First World War ('Limits' 110). Gale and D'Monté share Cameron's uneasiness with Sydney's self-abnegation. Gale calls her 'self-sacrificing' and 'martyred' ('Women' 30) and D'Monté groups the play with gender-politically ambivalent dramas of the period which she finds guilty of 'clinging to past expectations' ('Gender' 2). She believes that by making Margaret 'set free by the new divorce laws' by effecting

her liberation only on the dubious condition that Sydney replace her and relinquish her own chance of marriage instead it misses the opportunity to instil an optimistic feminist agenda ('British' 130).

A feminist counter-reading is perfectly plausible however. First, in the manner of some of Dane's later fiction, the play charts the triumph of her heroine over the degenerative pitfall of insanity which befalls the men in their families. Sydney's heredity does not impede her exceptionalism; physically, emotionally and morally, she is the most robust of the characters and the hero of the piece, proof that madness in the genes does not always infect the next generation. Indeed, inherited taint has perhaps created Sydney, the cream of the family milk. Furthermore, the play's outcome reflects Dane's comprehension of modern cultural pressures which prevent Sydney from transcending prescribed mores of dutiful conduct and achieving the kind of independent forward liminal movement that her later heroines enjoy. The peculiar nature of inter-war feminism accounts for the narrative balance between promoting female freedom (through Margaret's story) and a strong sense of responsibility to damaged men (Sydney's story). Sydney represents a modern generation of women who are misread: her mother accuses her of thinking only 'of – self – self-self! Money and ambition', of behaving 'like the rest of the young women. Hard as nails!' (*Bill* 92), guilty of rejecting a perfectly good suitor because she deems him 'not good enough for her' (*ibid.*). Retaliating with 'I'm not hard' (*ibid.*), Sydney voices Dane's opinion that not all flappers are cold-hearted and this is supported by her filial sacrifice. Furthermore, in a progressive dramatic manoeuvre, signifying a feminist re-evaluation of women's roles, what Sydney is forced to relinquish, the chance of marriage, is ironically the very institution in which women have been traditionally most repressed. If the first wave of feminism meant 'spinsterhood was now capable of being a form of resistance for women because social and economic changes had made it more likely that women could survive without marriage' (Jeffreys qtd, in D'Monté 'Passion' 17), it seems that while 'the majority of male and female inter-war dramatists did not dwell on the positive aspects for women of remaining single' (D'Monté 'Passion' 17), Dane is the marked exception, who here pioneers rather than ignores this cultural shift as she does in her dramas as a whole. Given the creative and economic possibilities ahead of her as a single woman, Sydney's destiny is not hopelessly claustrophobic and ultimately she is not a martyr because her single status affords attractive compensations, opportunities to embrace liminality and independence which are closed to her married counterparts. Articulating Dane's own confidence in the new possibilities for self-actualisation, she tells her father: 'I've got such plans. [. . .] We'll do things. We'll have a good time. [. . .] Did you know you'd got a clever daughter? Writing – painting – acting! We'll go on tour together. We'll make a lot of money. We'll have a cottage somewhere' (*Bill* 91–92). In a move to perhaps reassure herself of the validity of the

professional success that compensated for the fact that she herself would never marry,² Dane succeeds in offering Sydney up to her audience as an example of liberating alternative domestic arrangements. In this nuanced plot, family duty and the 'deprivations' associated with spinsterhood paradoxically empower Sydney to subject the family patriarch to compassionate control and pursue a life defined by freedom and creative vision. It is significant to Dane's androgenisation of her characters that she calls the shell-shocked, sickly and feminised father, Hilary, a name given to both men and women, and his strong daughter, the equally gender-neutral name, Sidney, echoing her own adoption of a masculine pseudonym.

Bill of Divorcement is a problem play in the tradition of the popular realist dramatic form which emerged in the nineteenth century, which was characteristically driven by a social-problem agenda, exercised through debates between characters with opposing views. As a neither wholly comic nor wholly tragic drama, it is also a problem play of the Shakespearean kind, as are Dane's next two plays, *The Way Things Happen* (1924) and *Mariners* (1927). Both focus on social ills through an interplay of plots of unresolvable human suffering and romantic resolutions and thus avoid both the depthlessness of comedy and the sentimentality of melodrama. Loosely based on the famous problem play, *Measure for Measure*, *The Way Things Happen* appropriates Shakespeare's plot, centring on a female protagonist who, like Isabella, weighs up the cultural and spiritual cost of losing her virginity to a seducer who holds the power to save a man who is dear to her in return. Shirley Pryde, penniless orphan, exceptional, self-respecting and dignified with a particularly apt surname, is unofficially adopted by a middle-class family who fall on hard times as a consequence of the privations of the post-war economy and are reduced to living in a modest house in the suburbs. Martin Farren, family son and newly returned soldier, whom Shirley secretly loves, resorts to stealing bonds from the insurance office where he works to pay off debts incurred through his desperation to provide his girlfriend, Muriel Hanbury, with the expensive lifestyle which she covets. Just as Muriel's desires ruin his moral integrity, Bennet Lomaz, manager in Martin's works, likewise preys on Shirley's virtue, blackmailing her to sleep with him by threatening otherwise to expose Martin's crime, about which he is fully conversant. Like Sydney, Shirley is possessed of a modern female identity which amalgamates virtue, modern resilience and feistiness and equips her with compassion and benevolence. Her romantic regard for Martin is characteristic of the equivocations of Dane's early inter-war texts, before the gender political development of her work actuated the rejection of men as the solution to women's troubles. Her self-sacrifice for the man she dotes on suggests an anti-feminist outlook, but the play is redeemed from gender conservatism by the manner of her consent and response to her deflowering. Markedly different from Shakespeare's Isabella and her Victorian and Edwardian forebears too, she is a modern

girl who does not concern herself with patriarchal Christian strictures on female chastity, or consider the act as the means of her permanent ruin. Rather, she views it as equivalent to the sacrifices which Martin made on the battlefield of the Last Offensive and the idealistic martyrdom of courageous wartime female espionage agents. While Muriel, the 'bad' kind of flapper, dismisses the war as irrelevant, Shirley takes it very seriously and grasps its implications. Shaped by its tragedies, and touched by its stories, particularly accounts of female bravery, she believes that unselfish acts, however disagreeable, are sometimes necessary for the greater good and treats her bargain with Lomax as pragmatic and even heroic, making of her a woman of courage. Through her perspective on the war and her liberal sexual attitudes, she demonstrates the best of Victorian social responsibility combined with a positive relaxing of unhelpful cultural strictures. Unlike Muriel and Lomax, who sneer at sexual purity, she believes in sexual loyalty but within a modern flexible framework. Furthermore, her sexual transgression goes unpunished and she is rewarded at the close of the play, suggestive of the narrative's investment in a modern hegemony which no longer stipulates female chastity at all costs. Following a sequence of events in which Lomax reneges on his side of his bargain and Martin is sent to jail for his crime and returns to his family sometime after his release, reduced, feminised and broken, Shirley becomes head of the Farren household when she marries Martin and he assumes a subordinate position within their relationship. This outcome, which reflects a war-damaged zeitgeist in which it was 'no longer possible to be properly male' (Light 7), was seen as evidence of a 'definite anti-man tendency' by one pre-feminist critic of the play (Hubert Griffith qtd. in Oliver 99). Her relationship with Martin's mother also embeds a feminist agenda. Mrs Farren is untypical of the hostile matriarchs prevalent in inter-war dramas discussed by Gale, Cameron and D'Monté: rather than oppose Shirley, she nurtures and supports her while Martin is away until her death towards the end of the play and bequeaths her her son along with advice to reject the traditional roles of her own generation and embrace modernity. 'I may be Victorian' she declares, 'but I *approve* of the women of to-day. They're full-grown citizens. If Martin comes back – grown – he won't want a mother to bully him, or a sister to run his errands. He'll want a partner: a woman with rights of her own' (*The Way* 73). In contrast to the strong bond which Shirley shares with Mrs Farren, Muriel isolates herself from female friendship and is punished for her antagonism towards Shirley and the havoc she wreaks in Martin's life with an unhappy marriage embarked upon solely to provide her with financial security. Too selfish and trivial to deserve the life, benefits and career of the truly modern woman, her ambition to live by her typewriter is unrealised, and household drudgery and unwanted motherhood become her fate. Feminist messages thus pervade the play, urging the importance of women's mutual supportiveness and ownership of their

sexuality, expressing admiration for their often dangerous war work, and highlighting the opportunity open to them to gently subordinate men within modern marital arrangements.

Mariners also fulfils Dane's customary purpose of configuring modes of modern womanhood based on self-actualisation, responsible behaviour and impeccable integrity. In the play, a comic plot which traces Joan Shepperley's journey to self-knowledge and personal power intersects with the gloomier tale of doomed local vicar, Benjy Cobb. Joan seeks to negotiate an identity apart from her aristocratic mother, Lady Sara, and her spinster-aunt, Ann, but in sharp contrast to the stereotyping in female-authored drama which Gale, D'Monté and Cameron identify, through which matriarchs are configured as normative Victorian throwbacks, variously cold hearted, powerful monsters or dominant but well-meaning 'household engineers' embedding conservative ideology into the narrative through benignly steering their daughters towards traditional conceptions of womanhood (Gale, *West* 121), Lady Sara is ineffectual and accepts the waning of her power. She complains mildly that daughters don't talk to their mothers anymore, is bewildered by her 'modern daughter!', who controls her so 'it's a question of what she lets me [do]' (*Mariners* 15) and rails in vain against modern gender role reversals, how Joan's domination of her boyfriend, the aptly named desperate Gerry Despard, is 'all the wrong way round' compared to 'when I was young' and '*we* did the clinging' (14). Her regime is easily toppled and the play is imbued with a galvanising feminist spirit, a will to depict modern women transcending the limited lives of an older female generation and exceeding their low expectations. The widespread installation of electricity in the 1920s, even in modest houses, meant that young women withstanding pressures from their elders to go to bed early in line with tradition, were able to extend the length and breadth of their day and even cross domestic thresholds after dark to engage freely and unchaperoned in social interaction with their peers. Joan is one of these women, empowered to challenge her mother's directive to retire to bed early in order to save on electricity and manage her daughter's movements, on account of her salary. Offering to pay the energy bill herself signifies her generational progress towards emancipation. Despite their disagreements on this issue and on other matters, there is little real antagonism between mother and daughter and they enjoy a warm relationship, typical of Dane's positive inter-generational female relationships. Likewise, Aunt Ann functions not as an object of derision or butt of comedy but as a lesson from the past, an example of a condition of family dependency that the younger generation can choose to reject, consistent with Dane's pervasive message to young women to opt to live well-rounded and fulfilled lives. Indeed, through a modern re-evaluation of the role of the single woman, Dane suggests that it is now possible to envisage spinsterhood in positive terms and it is not spinsterhood in itself which causes Joan

anxiety, but the economic dependency and lack of sexual freedom which has traditionally been the spinster's lot.

Joan has options: to quest a single life, which unlike the unenviable style of her aunt and others of her aunt's generation, encompasses the potential to enter into a sexual relationship with Gerry and earn a respectable £300 a year as a fashion designer, or to combine marriage and career. Markedly more modern than Shirley Farren, who, despite the emotional power which she holds in her marriage, remains economically dependent on her husband, she has prospered by persuading her family to provide her with a good education, especially in art, which has enabled her to build her dress designing business. Her relationship with Gerry is central to the play's message about modern womanhood. Like Martin Farren and Hilary Fairfield, Gerry is a feminised man struggling in a world that privileges masculinity. Psychically damaged by shell-shock, he drinks heavily, and lack of opportunities after the war have made it impossible for him to 'get a foot in anywhere' (*Mariners* 67–8). For most of the play Joan is reluctant to marry him, anxious about her ability to balance imperatives to meet his emotional needs and realise her career ambition, and nervous about the economic pressure to support them both. These problems, likely familiar to twenty-first-century female readers, are not generally considered high up the list of preoccupations for inter-war women, yet, as *Man Proud Man* testifies, keeping men who were unable to make their own living was just as much of a pressing concern for modern women as securing a husband in a post-war world depleted of potential male spouses. Her dilemma is paralleled with the strain experienced by Benjy Cobb, whose attentions are divided between his parishioners and his troubled wife, Lily. Lily Cobb, given to emotional excess and slovenly behaviour, is unpopular with the class-conscious village community on account of her origins as 'a hotel-keeper's daughter' (16) who has married to better herself and then brought her husband low. When Benjy dies from influenza contracted on one of his parish visits, she becomes overcome with grief, goes missing and dies of exposure at her husband's graveside. In the unions of both Joan and Gerry and Benjy and Lily, one partner exhibits more mental stamina and moral courage than the other but significantly, their behaviour is not demarcated in relation to biology but is socially constructed. Older than Joan, Lily hails from a traditional world of separate gender spheres and roles and while her husband is continually out and about in his parish, she plunges into housewifely isolation. Like Joan, she designs and makes clothes, but while the modern heroine is a professional seamstress who feels proud of the independence which she gains through her work, Lily's sewing is an unrewarding, unpaid domestic task. Stuck in a traditional role, empty of emotional and economic resources, her depression and inertia inadvertently drag her marriage down and she cannot save her husband from illness any more than he can save her from misery. Benjy's tragedy is ironically precipitated

by social constructiveness too. When he is clearly suffering from the ravages of influenza, because his internalisation of patriarchal philosophy compels him to turn down Lily's offer to reverse roles and do his rounds for him, he loses his life. With reversed positions in the next generation and Despard's emotional chaos threatening to pull his stronger modern female partner under, Joan is more emotionally and economically well-equipped to haul her partner up from the watery depths.

The two plotlines in *Mariners* coincide when Joan and Gerry become involved with Benjy and Lily's troubles. In this tolerant play about accepting people as they are, Joan's moral integrity, empathy and altruistic sentiments mean she can transcend class barriers and overlook Lily's deficiencies and try to help, and it is this connection with the Cobbs which rescues her own floundering relationship. When Lily goes missing, Gerry snaps out of his mood of self-pity and depression to search for the lost woman, assuming an assertive role for the first time, and her death shocks him into realising how lucky he is to be alive. Moved by Lily and Benjy's suffering and the depth of their love which crossed class boundaries and survived the disapproval of the villagers, Joan and Gerry become romantically restored, overcome their relationship difficulties and enter into marriage at the end of the play. Their union is further facilitated by the Cobb connection when Lily's old beau and friend of Benjy, Sir James Fowler, who has risen up the social scale since the three were first acquainted, arrives out of the blue and joins the search for Lily, becoming friendly with Despard in the process, and consequently offering him 'an apprenticeship - in his 'works' (*Mariners* 67). This pulls him out of the economic and psychological doldrums for good. The theme of emotional submergence which threatens all four main protagonists is reflected in the title of the play, named after a song which Benjy teaches the village choir. The choral refrain, pronounced by the parishioners as 'ye gentlemen of England/ Oo live at 'ome at ease/ 'Ow little do ye *think* upon/The daingers of the seas./Give ear unto the mariners' (2) - echoes the near fate of Despard and the destiny of the Cobbs, and Lily in particular. With the exception of Joan and Gerry, neither the aristocratic Shepperleys or the ordinary villagers come to her rescue when she is clearly 'drowning'.

St John Ervine argues that unlike most dramatists, whose work became more mainstream as the century progressed, Dane's later work was more 'highbrow' and less determined by the precepts of popular genre than her first plays, and he counts her among the minority of playwrights who 'could address themselves in their earliest dramas to broadly popular audiences and then gradually develop a taste for caviar' (qtd. in Nicholl 152). Given that *A Bill of Divorcement*, *The Way Things Happen* and *Mariners* have serious and uncomfortable elements, and her last inter-war play, *Moonlight is Silver* (1934) is considerably lighter in tone and more conventional in form, Ervine's assessment is open to scrutiny. Enjoying a respectable eighty-five performances, it is the only one

of her dramas with the kind of romantic plotting which played to the current fashion for country-house comedies. Pandering to an inter-war nationalistic yearning and nostalgia for a mythical conception of traditional English life and celebrating moneyed middle-class families emulating the life style of the aristocracy, this genre generally met with derision by theatre commentators but was well-liked by audiences. Perhaps for this reason, Dane capitulated to the popularity of the genre and abided by its strictures. While *Mariners* tells some uncomfortable truths about the wealthy failing in their responsibilities to the poor, *Moonlight is Silver* makes no judgement about the country-house lifestyle of its socially privileged characters. Situated in a generic country house in the Home Counties, of the type that 'stood for all that was middlebrow and middle class,' (D'Monté 'Feminising' 141), the play's comforting conclusion rests upon the survival of a traditional marriage complete with non-working wife, making it more conservative than Dane's other work in this period and more in line with the gender-politically ambivalent and limited plays discussed by D'Monté and Cameron. Yet although it plays to audiences' fascination with the glamour of upper-class lives, it is infused with modern feminist elements and its feminist sensibilities are plainly visible in the working out of Dane's ubiquitous thematic of the transforming models of womanhood in the modern era, dramatised through the different ideologies of four generations of women. Dame Agnes Ronsard is a sixty-year-old former war effort relief organiser, who according to the stage directions, 'in her day was a woman of the world, an original woman in a conventional world' (*Moonlight is Silver* 1). Barbara Dawe, 'girlfriend' of the elder Ronsard son, Gilbert, is middle aged, 'also a woman of the world, but of a later date and brand' (ibid.); Josephine, married to younger son, Stephen, is in her late twenties and of the flapper generation: 'gay, poised, humorous' (13); and visiting granddaughter, Dorry, is a tomboyish modern adolescent who enjoys an easy freedom of movement to come and go as she pleases and does not need servants to make her sandwiches. Like Lady Sara Shepperley, Dame Agnes is a matriarch whose power is in decline; the next generations of women determine the course of their own lives outside of her control and her advice to her children and their partners goes largely unheeded. Corresponding to Lady Sara's experience of motherhood, her relationship with the younger women in her family is unlike the antagonistic power struggle of other female-authored plays of the period; she is loved and indulged more than feared and venerated, and Barbara especially 'is devoted' to her (2). Supportive to all the women in the family, Barbara is Dane's prototype of exceptional modern womanhood. Like her author, she is a successful middle-aged spinster playwright and her single status is anything but pitiable. She has fashioned herself an alternative domesticity, spending relaxed, bohemian-style weekends working on plays with her (boy) friend, Gilbert, more than happy to retreat afterwards to 'my

own flat and my own telephone' (91). Gilbert and Barbara are close but their relationship is decidedly companionable; as Gilbert points out to Barbara, 'we can no more be romantic about love than we can about the moon. We know too much about the interior construction of both' (13). It is also far more stable and less fraught than Stephen and Josephine's decidedly troubled old-fashioned marriage, and in the spirit of feminism, the play exonerates Barbara's style of relationship at the expense of Josephine's moony vulnerable romance. The differences between the two couples reveal a modern contradiction. As some young women were beginning to forget the hard won victories of the previous generation, a style of heterosexual relationship which harked back to traditional constructions of womanhood had begun to creep back into fashion and as the older, more prosaic and forward thinking Barbara leaves older gender constructions far behind, Josephine casts herself in a traditional and ultimately defenceless role. Her ostensibly confident modernity is easily crushed by her romantic sensibilities, and when traditional married and family life is found inadequate and falters, she relies upon Barbara to come to her rescue.

According to a publisher's note in the frontspiece, the play's title was changed to 'Moonlight is Silver' after an eponymous song co-written by Dane and Richard Addinsell for Josephine's character 'at the last moment' (Barrow 88); its original title was 'Ring of Truth', which more foregrounded the central metaphor of fake and genuine glass that symbolises the play's principal theme of human authenticity. This is signified through Stephen and Gilbert's interest in collecting antique glass, a trope which recalls the precious minerals imagery that saturates *Othello*. Indeed, as *The Way Things Happen* writes back to *Measure for Measure*, *Moonlight is Silver* is a feminist revision of Shakespeare's Venetian tragedy, illuminating the subtextual narrative of patriarchal oppressive power and female solidarity in its source. Like *Othello*, who realises too late that Desdemona is a jewel, Stephen, ironically a connoisseur of expensive glassware, is unable to distinguish between real and fake human sincerity, wrongly suspecting Josephine, his most precious piece of 'glass', of adultery. In the source, Desdemona's fate is determined by her lack of cultural power within a sixteenth-century Southern-European patriarchal system which is slow to recognise masculine abuse and whose objectification of woman as a valuable possession forces her into silence, submission and martyrdom. In 1930s England, on the other hand, one of Stephen's silly 'storms of the brain' (*Moonlight is Silver* 94) is but a mild version of *Othello*'s delusional jealousy. His weakened masculinity, characteristic of the zeitgeist, derails the potentially catastrophic consequences and although his suspicions threaten his marriage, fortunately he lacks the necessary legitimacy and aggression to take Josephine's life. Thus he plans divorce, not murder, and his purpose is easily foiled by Josephine and Barbara working together to assert their joint cultural

and personal weight. A predominant feature of *Othello*, and ubiquitous element in Dane's work, is the clear-eyed key female protagonist with greater vision than her male counterparts. Barbara's common sense and solidarity with Josephine echoes Emilia's down-to-earth friendship and protectiveness of Desdemona. Whereas Emilia voices the truth in vain to try to prevent Desdemona's death however, Barbara more successfully speaks up to save Josephine's marriage, and Stephen is reduced to clinging dependently to his wife and forced to drop his accusations. The play is perhaps guilty of ignoring the pernicious realities of domestic abuse, but its confidence in the upcoming power of women in their relationships and its overriding feminist optimism is compelling.

Imagining the disappearance of patriarchal marriage, the play also bears witness to other changes of outlook in the modern world. Gilbert, urbane playwright and the play's creative spokesman, voices the dramatist's complaint that Shakespearian-type tragedy is fast becoming a defunct dramatic medium and his dialogue with Barbara on this subject reveals the problems of writing for the modern theatre. This perhaps accounts for the rationale for the romantic plot of *Moonlight is Silver*, reflective of Dane's own dramatic interests, strategies and professional anxieties. In a twentieth-century context in which Romeo and Juliet's anguish is out of place, where people are freer to marry who they like and nobody expects love to last anyway, Gilbert is obliged to meet the needs, requirements and desires of cynical inter-war playgoers in order to maintain and improve his success as a playwright. He is stuck between a rock and a hard place; while the structuring principle of tragic universality, intrinsic to Shakespeare's vision, is inappropriate to modern audiences, staging comic plots is precarious too, given that unvarying contentment is never dramatically interesting. Discussing this with Barbara, he concludes that writing comedy is nevertheless the best way to create commercial successes, as modern audiences uncomfortable with theatrical catharsis and awesome emotions are likely to identify and sympathise with central characters who epitomise the current cultural fashion for light-heartedness and jollity in an age characterised by a 'loss of tragic vision' (Gale, *West* 108). Through dialogue between her playwriting protagonists, Dane underlines the demerits of succumbing to the unavoidable and inevitable new popular genres of melodrama, farce and comedy. Keeping her solid Othelloian plot but lightening the tone facilitates her feminist agenda, speaking to modern female audiences of marital dangers and the positive transformations of gender-related power structures underway in her present time. It is suggested that they would do well to learn from the play's female protagonists: Josephine, who ultimately gains control over an emotional weakened male body and Barbara, who remains unsusceptible to the pitfalls of romantic love and after witnessing Josephine's marital mess, is reminded to remain single rather than risk her heart and happiness by putting all her eggs in one (romantic) basket.

Plays by other inter-war female dramatists were less inclined than Dane's to 'dwell on the positive aspects for women of remaining single' and 'there was a new emphasis on the inherent social, sexual and psychological problems for women in not getting married, which, it was suggested, would automatically become more severe as women grew older' (D'Monté 'Passion' 17). Playwrights G.B. Stern and Dodie Smith demonstrate this anxiety. In the opening of Stern's 1931 comedy drama, *The Man Who Pays the Piper*, Daryll Fairley happily grasps her chance of independence before ultimately capitulating to pressures to believe that fulfilment is best achieved through becoming a traditional stay-at home wife. The play explores the ubiquitous inter-war female themes of identity construction in a climate of confused and weakened masculinity, and reflecting on the home environment, it tests the possibility of alternative domesticities. Aged eighteen in 1913 when the play opens and thirty-five when it concludes, Daryll is Dane's approximate contemporary and the likely age of most of Stern's female audience, and is alert to the effects of the war on the shaping of positive female identities distinct from the identities of the preceding submissive generation of Victorian women and the careless flapper age group which followed. The first Act, or 'Prologue' dramatises an altercation between Daryll and her father, Arthur, who resents having to get up in the middle of the night when she arrives late from a party to let her in to the well-to-do family home in Holland Park. Latch-keys work like electric lighting in inter-war women's drama, signifying new opportunities for liminal access to the outer world, and whereas Daryll is forbidden a latch key because she is a woman, her brother, Guy is entitled to one because, to Arthur's mind, 'he's a man – or may be, very soon' (*The Man* 6). Arthur's gender polarising regulations, the basis too for his discouragement of his daughter's ambitions to start a business, quickly become irrelevant when both father and son are killed in the war. Daryll subsequently fills the power void left by the dead paterfamilias, becoming head of the household and director of a successful fashion house. Unexpectedly obligated to economically support those closest to her, her new position is a microcosm of the wide-scale post-war gender reconfiguration which saw many women become wage earners, propping up other women and unemployable men. She assumes full charge of her mother, Rosie, her sisters, Anthea, Penelope and Fay, and three effete and financially incapable and dependent men, including Rosie's second husband, Ben, who is unable to hold down a job and freely admits "I've got no stability" (30) and Daryll's brother, Frank. Frank's speech acts are characteristically ineffectual: Given the job of staying at home to direct an engineer contracted to come and fix the heating, for instance, he issues weak appeals using feminine-identified linguistic hedges such as 'if you could *possibly* manage' (58) and ultimately it is left for Daryll to more forcefully resolve the crisis on her return from work.

As was customary in female-authored drama of the period, the ideals, conduct and self-conceptualisation of young and older women are opposed. While Ben values Rosie because she is 'sweet and gentle and simple and domestic and pretty and soft' (*The Man* 30) and older sister Anthea is as her younger-generational sibling, Fay, puts it, 'a womanly woman' like her mother (38), Daryll and Faye are modern constructions. There is a marked difference in the nature of their modern identities, however. Daryll 'can't bear silly little half-witted flappers' (9) and is irritated when Faye becomes one, hedonistic, trivial, and irresponsible, reneging on family commitments, performing 'a special rush-round stunt in taxis' instead of attending her mother's wedding breakfast (35), amassing a large overdraft and draining Daryll's financial resources to pay it off. Mirroring the behaviour of Daryll's younger partying self, witnessed at the beginning of the play, Fay also makes disruptive late night entrances, but she is far more disorderly. While Daryll comes home just after midnight, having drunk only one glass of wine and accompanied by respectable suitor, Rufus Waring, Fay staggers in at ten to four in the morning with a 'rabble' of drunk revellers (46), smoking cigarettes and equipped with a large quantity of whiskey. She and her friends cause mayhem, throwing records around and spilling drinks, and the next morning the dining-room is, according to Daryll, 'foul with ash and cigarette smoke and empty beer bottles littered all over the place' (68-9). The stage directions delineate the different attitudes of pre- and post-war young women thus: Fay and her friends are 'a good deal noisier and more uncontrolled than DARYLL and RUFUS were, in the Prologue, but not quite so naturally gay. General atmosphere of FAY and her crowd is far more sophisticated' (43). Modern in a worldly and destructive way, Faye is paradoxical: carefree yet melancholy, and also freer but less politically feminist than Daryll. Being modern ironically means conforming to older forms of economic gender stereotypes. Habitually forgetting to take her latch-key out with her symbolises her failure to appreciate the hard won battle for autonomy 'fought by her predecessors' (36) and her fashionable economically helplessness recalls Dane's Josephine Ronsard in *Moonlight is Silver*. When Daryll raises the question, 'I suppose that's what you want, ultimately, to be independent?' she replies, '*this is 1926!* Independence and work and bright brave bachelor girls? Oh-no, darling: I'd much rather live at home [. . .] getting cosy and chewing the cud' (70), not 'financially independent, or any of that mediaeval stuff' (72) and she assumes as her right, all avoidance of responsibility, to be kept and to be safe. Daryll challenges her for seeming 'to have got an idea that a home is an abstraction, that grows and floats and supports itself in a sort of dream' (70), for failing to recognise the precarious nature of her older sister's alternative more feminist reconfiguration of their formerly patriarchal domestic family context, which is ironically endangered by women most likely to benefit from it, like Fay herself.

While Fay represents a new generation of young women retreating from feminism, unenthusiastic about opportunities coveted and claimed before the war by New Women agitators and campaigners, Daryll, of this earlier generation, cannot comprehend Fay's contradictory mandate for freedom with dependency. As the play develops, however, she too loses her zest for careerism because of the family responsibilities which have come with it, and the repetition of the prologue structure in Act One, with Daryll rather than her father now in dominant position, not only connotes alterations in gender roles but also highlights anxieties generated by these changes. As 'the door of Daryll's room opens, the same door as in the prologue' (*The Man* 46), with Fay now 'in disgrace' (48) and Daryll in authority, the older woman's entrance 'recalls her father's exit in the prologue. Her shoulders droop as though she is burdened rather beyond her strength' (48–49). Supporting her needy and recalcitrant family has weighed her down, 'her body is sagging with fatigue, her nerves taught and brittle' (54). In a later scene, she expresses a desire for the return of male-orchestrated discipline to control Fay, for 'a large heavy Victorian father' to 'come bellowing into the room, and just take you and wallop you!' (69), and she is clearly now uncomfortable in her masculine role and in need of support. Wearying of 'the whole world stuffed up with idiots who can't do anything unless they're told and then they do it wrong', and 'noise everywhere and nothing ever getting done properly [. . .]. And not a man in the whole world, except myself, to stop them' (60), she confesses to a lowering of spirits. 'I'm dog tired and I haven't slept', she complains, 'we've got scarlet fever in my workroom and paper hangers in my bedroom, and Benny on the stairs with his double bass and *he* can't make any money and Scott can't make any money, but they all come and live in this house where there isn't a father – not one single father except me' (*ibid.*). Ultimately dissatisfied with inter-war opportunities for gender reconstruction, she hankers after a more traditional feminine identity, to be 'not fussed over, but just looked after' (64), and when Fay remarks, 'I suppose you've been a spinster too long and you've got inhibited [. . .] you ought to get married [. . .] it would do you good', she responds: 'I'm sure it would' (68). At the end of Act 2, when a *deus-ex-machina* manoeuvre means that her mother inherits enough money to keep the family and she is freed from financial responsibility, she begs Rufus Waring, to 'take me and marry me – and *smash* me! Begin me all over again and make me into the usual sort of wife' (77).

Stepping back from her fashion business in order to fulfil a wifely role, the implications of relinquishing her androgynous identity are dramatised again by mirroring an earlier narrative event in order to draw parallels between her old and new life. Awaiting Rufus's return from work, the stage directions call attention to 'the atmosphere . . . distinctly that of awe and expectancy usual in any normal household during the half hour before the Masters return from business, and very much recalling

the opening scene of act one before Daryll's return', when her family anxiously busied themselves to make the home conducive to her rest and relaxation (*The Man* 78). Daryll is now the subservient partner however, and when she breaks one of Rufus's records and hides the pieces under the sofa, her act recalls the nervous attempts of Daphne Du Maurier's beleaguered Mrs De Winter to conceal the fragments of a broken cupid statue. Fay notes the irony of her sister's alteration from gentle tyrant to fearful wife, retorting 'she didn't want her husband to know – oh poor wee wifey! [. . .] Oh, the mills of God, the whirligig of time – Daryll the magnificent!' (86). When Daryll discovers that her business is in jeopardy without her and it is necessary that she take back the reins in order to save it, she risks her marriage in order to 'to have something to do again – something to organise, something continuous and constructive, not just time dribbling through your fingers' (96). Intending to divorce Rufus and depart for Paris to settle business problems there, she blames the relationship break-up on social constructions wrought by the war, which meant women 'had to take over' (97). She calculates that 'I'm not the only one; I expect there's a whole generation of us, ruined for marriage. Once you're head of a house, once you're a father, once you go out to business and come back again in the evening and pay the bills, you're done for, ever afterwards, as a wife!' (96–97). Her internalisation of cultural prejudice against career women leads her to conceive of herself as 'desperately out of proportion' (98), a 'freak' like all 'my generation of girls' who might have been a wife and mother 'so easily', if the war, which 'didn't do all its damage out in France' had 'let me alone' (99). Rufus responds by calling her bluff. He offers to renounce his own career and proposes that they buy a house in the country where he can tend a garden and wait for her to join him at the end of her working weeks in London, while simultaneously deviously slipping into the conversation that 'there's no denying it, there's still a conventional prejudice; men must work and women must weep – all that' (105). His cunning pays off: horrified at the prospect of his emasculation, she reverts to a state of pre-feminist false consciousness, suddenly believing it 'unnatural and horrible [. . .] for me to be the husband [. . .], I'd be ashamed.[. . .] We can't change places in that way and still be happy' (108). Rufus' endeavours to persuade her to change her mind about the divorce now become effortless; bowing before public opinion and her internalisation of patriarchal normative values, her resolve to regain her career independence dissolves completely. Palpably relieved that she is a natural woman after all, he declares delightedly, 'you need never, never, worry again as to whether you're normal or not. A more perfectly conventional, perfectly human, perfectly feminine, perfectly proper reaction I've never encountered', and responding to his suggestion that they 'have children, two or three, like other nice, sane, ordinary married men and women' (109), she 'makes a gesture of surrender – he kisses her – she clings to him' (110). The

fairytale closure is slightly ambiguous, however. The startling ease of the success of Rufus' manipulations is perhaps only plausible if Daryll's reaction is interpreted as equally calculating. Although her body language implies compliance, she makes no verbal assent to her husband's proposition that she stay home and procreate; conceivably, she allows him to think he has triumphed but still intends to resume her career. Indeed the play closes with her reiterating her desire to go to Paris, and although she vows to make this the last visit before settling down to a normative domestic role and begs permission to go, imploring, 'oh, Rufus, *may I?*' (ibid.) in a final gesture of recapitulation to the status quo, this may be merely a ruse.

Dodie Smith's frothier drawing room comedies manifest to an even greater degree women's fears of missing out on marriage. Her female protagonists readily assume the role ascribed to them by patriarchal culture and define themselves principally through their physical allure, conforming to prescribed ideals of feminine beauty with a sole motivation to secure or retain husbands. Dane contests hegemonic myths that stereotype relationships between women as fundamentally antagonistic, consistent with her personal faith in female solidarity which she expressed in the *Daily Herald*, that while 'people still tell you, even after the war, that women are mean to each other and catty to each other, and that they won't pull together and have no team sense [. . .] this is not true' (November 23, 1929). Smith, on the other hand, upholds the fallacy and is not concerned to establish female communities in her plays. Her heroines look out just for themselves and are repeatedly pitted against other women in battles to secure romantic alliances with men. As they try to sleep their way out of the doom of virginity and spinsterhood, active sexuality outside of marriage is practised not for the gratification of personal desire, but as a weapon to use against other women, part and parcel of a femininity performed to achieve a sense of cultural belonging through heterosexual marriage. Using their sexuality to gain romance is the misplaced solution to their repressive lives, and they remain blind to the gender-political bind through which they are fixed by the objectifying gaze of men and ultimately returned to normative repressive roles as wives and daughters. Men's behaviour is never open to scrutiny, gender-role revision is never on the agenda, and alternative modes of domesticity go unexplored. Smith openly admitted that she 'let surface detail dominate' in her dramas (qtd. in Grove 244) and considering the enormous value she placed on her own working life and the fact that she was the sole wage earner in her marriage, her light treatment of serious women's issues is surprising. Her outlook on sexuality was governed by a curious and paradoxical mix of traditionalism and permissiveness. She wrote a defence of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* for Sidney Campion's 1941 book on D.H. Lawrence (Grove 133), cohabitated with her husband for many years before they married, and staunchly defended homosexuality, prostitution, and

recreational drug use (201, 239, 285). Yet this open-mindedness does not appear to have been consolidated within a progressive gender-political framework. Her journals boast unashamedly of the sexual triumphs of her young self, her potent ability to seduce men away from their wives. In 1965, she referred proudly to her long affair with married department store proprietor, Ambrose Heal, declaring, 'I partly longed for affairs as status symbols [. . .] certainly, to "collect" the managing director of Heal's struck me as a substantial status symbol, particularly as I had not been over burdened with masculine admiration – although for an undersized, not pretty girl I seem to have done quite well' (86). Her own sexual adventures provided staple material for her dramas, in which sexualised heroines embroil themselves in somewhat distasteful romantic mishaps and measure their success through their sexual conquests. In *Autumn Crocus* (1931), Fanny, a young unmarried working woman on a continental tour with her friend, Edith, falls in love with the married proprietor of a German hotel, and resolves to remain there indefinitely, a cuckoo in the marital nest. Coming to her senses at the last minute and returning to England, her decision is not provoked by any sympathy for or sense of allegiance to the wronged wife, but by Edith's forewarnings of the damage to her reputation which staying in Germany would wreak. Her romantic hopes thwarted, the play intimates that 'there is apparently nothing left for her, but to grow old' (D'Monté 'Drama' 188), the luckless fate of fellow hotel-guest, Mrs Mayne, a stereotyped tragi-comic spinster-figure. Although the play perhaps seeks to dramatise the limited personal choices available to inter-war women, it problematically capitulates to hegemonic conceptions of spinsterhood as inevitably a condition of misery and failure. Opportunities for serious discussion about women's anxieties relating to their sexual currency are persistently overlooked in Smith's dramas in favour of comic treatments and reassuring outcomes. In *Touch Wood* (1934), two married couples become acquainted with an adolescent girl, Mab, and her two siblings while all are holidaying in the same hotel on the North West coast of Scotland. One of the couples, William and Vera Berridge, experience marital difficulties when Vera makes a desperate attempt to gain a sense of self-worth by embarking on an extra-marital affair with one of the other guests. This echoes the trouble brought to Sylvia and Robin Herriot's long and by all accounts happy marriage by Mab's efforts to seduce Robin by offering him the hope of children, which Sylvia has been unable to provide for him. Mab's destructive infatuation is lightly handled, a source of comedy, and the play sanctions her internalisation of patriarchal femininity, even though it is the foundation of her lack of self-respect and low self-esteem. In *Call it a Day* (1916), another young girl, Catherine Hilton, throws herself at an older married artist, unable to imagine for herself a viable identity beyond the role of inspirational muse to his creative work. In *Bonnet over the Windmill* (1937), when two aspiring and impoverished young

actresses, Janet Jason and Dinah Tilney, become friendly with a family of successful actors and writers, Dinah flirts with one brother, Brian, hoping that he will offer her an acting role and Janet risks her dignity for the same reason as Catherine, because she is 'happy to give herself to the playwright Kit Carson as a way of inspiring his writing' (D'Monté 'Drama' 190). The feminist connotation of a woman nailing her colours to the mast as an indicator of overt and public sexual defiance, which is intimated in the title of the play, are withheld when Kit abandons her the day after to sail to America and Janet's hanging her bonnet on the roof of his windmill home following the night of her deflowering is just a sad gesture of her public humiliation. When he chooses to sell his soul by writing inferior but lucrative scripts for Hollywood rather than stay and write the brilliant plays which she trusted her sexual healing could nurture, there is nothing left for her than to retreat to her lodgings and lick her wounds. To soften any serious feminist message which her sacrifice might otherwise convey, the play orchestrates a comic ending: she is rescued from the dreaded state of spinsterhood by a proposal of marriage from an old friend and admirer who saves her from impunity and endows her with a respectable feminine identity.

Contesting Masculine Abuses in Plays About the Past

Inter-war writer, journalist and drama critic, J.C. Trewin, employs a domestic analogy somewhat contemptuously in his evaluation of Smith's escapist domestic dramas, calling them 'suburban [. . .] milky tea, suitably sugared' (131–2). He continues in this metaphorical vein by drawing a distinction between what he regards as her trivial 'teacup storm' plots and the weightier dramatic 'tempests' of Dane's plays (*ibid.*). This points to the serious cultural issues present in *Bill of Divorcement*, *The Way Things Happen* and *Mariners* and also in Dane's more sombre historiographic plays. As Gale observes, Victorian melodramatic theatre traditions were 'transformed' by women playwrights in the inter-war period into 'complex readings of the human condition [. . .] more applicable to the twentieth-century experience than that of the nineteenth century', and Dane's loosely melodramatic historical dramas can be counted among those whose reputations Gale has been keen to rescue on account of their 'investigative attitude' (*West* 108). They afforded her considerably more 'kudos' than her comic plays, *Moonlight is Silver* in particular (Barrow 88). She was at her most comfortable writing about remote contexts 'somewhat removed from reality, steeped in literary allusions', appealing 'to the esoteric in the audience' (*ibid.*) and in period 'replete with biblical plays' (Barker 33), of Dane's three historical pieces, two were feminist revisionist biblical bio-dramas: *Naboth's Vineyard* (1925), based on a story from the Old Testament's Book of Kings, and *Herod and Mariamne* (1938), a rework of events which took place in Rome during 004 B.C.

Her third was *Granite* (1926), an unsettling and intensely dark and anxious drama set in the more recent nineteenth century. Distinguishable from the ubiquitous female-authored plays which endorsed normative gender configurations and traditional family structures, Dane's historical dramas tear the veil from the face of patriarchal family life in order to expose its brutality, and Shakespearian concepts of universal suffering are invigorated with feminist commentaries on historical gender oppressions. As persecuted women protagonists struggle to exert control over their cultural circumstances and strive to escape patriarchal tyranny, they are unable to locate liminal crossing spaces to the kind of gender-female emotional or geographical spaces which are within the grasp of Dane's modern heroines, and they move in ever-decreasing circles towards their doom. To keep feminism from sliding backwards she chronicles exceptional women battling against adversity. Her tales of enforced female subservience and lack of agency in past contexts serve as 'herstories', revising received misogynistic accounts of key events in order to rally modern female audiences to hold fast to what, according to Dane's optimistic inter-war feminist consciousness, they have achieved.

Granite was Dane's favourite play (Trewin, 129), running for a creditable 65 performances. Like *Moonlight is Silver*, it traces a Shakespearian narrative. Loosely resembling Lady Macbeth, the central protagonist, Judith Morris, is physically, mentally and spiritually undone by her part in the murder of her brutalising farmer-husband, Jordan Proctor, offering up her soul to the devil in return for his death so that she can marry Prosper, his gentler brother. Like *Macbeth*, the play has supernatural undertones; it is unclear as to whether a man who comes from the sea is a convict or a satanic servant sent from the devil to do Judith's monstrous bidding. Unlike *Macbeth*, however, the destructive female is relatively innocent, and driven not by greed but by a will to survive. Judith is also identified with Nelson's famous mistress, Emma Hamilton.³ Prosper manifests the nineteenth-century vogue for demonising Hamilton, denouncing her as the force 'behind the filthy [. . .] Naples business', her affair with Nelson which led him astray there, (*Granite* 121) and the play counters this misogynistic outlook, positing male brutalisation rather than female wiliness, as the real enemy of civilisation, seeking to create sympathy for Judith and rescue Hamilton's reputation in the process. Jordan keeps Judith in the iron fist of the ruins of a twelfth-century castle on Lundy island off the North Devon coast. Formerly a prison, the island is virtually uninhabitable, surrounded by hostile waters and fringed by unforgiving iron-grey rocks which provide an unsurmountable barrier to Judith's escape. The possibility of deliverance comes with the arrival of an escaped convict who has managed to survive the wrecking of his prison ship and clamber up the cliffs to safety. Overhearing Judith make her diabolical bargain, he proposes a pact of his own, to kill any man who physically threatens her on condition that she gives him sanctuary at

the farmhouse. Subsequently throwing Jordan over the cliff, he becomes a menacing presence in Judith's life and ultimately destroys her chances of happiness by deliberately overreacting to mildly threatening gestures which Prosper, ironically named, makes to Judith during a domestic argument and tipping him into the sea to his death.

St John Ervine was relieved by what he saw as *Granites'* abandonment of Dane's characteristic project to undermine masculinity; he declared that 'at last' she creates male characters 'in the image of men' and was encouraged by the 'verity' of the play's depiction of men as inherently manly (qtd. in Barrow 43). This may explain why he judged the play 'most impressive' from 'within the neighbourhood of greatness' (ibid.). In his enthusiasm for the machismo performances however, he failed to spot the feminist subtext relating to inequities of gender power, underscored through key structural tropes of sea, land and landscape. The wild ocean is a barrier to Judith's freedom and the instrument of Jordan's abuse of his economic supremacy, providing him with a ready supply of fresh wrecks to plunder and men on board to rob and throw back into the sea to drown. He exploits human life on land likewise, using human bondage to control the hostile island landscape and make it profitable. The antithesis of Judith's relationship with their young servant, Penny, characteristic of Dane's fictional loving and mutually supportive female friendships, Jordan creates a slave relationship with the girl, who he commodifies to be 'reared' like a domestic animal 'of value' (*Granite* 90). The shipwrecked stranger is similarly subjugated by him to work his farm and he is closely identified with Judith. She is imprisoned by her gender as he is bound by his class and both dwell in the margins of power, alienated from the land and persecuted by patriarchal legalities. Unlike Joan Shepperley, whose modern world is flooded with electricity, Judith's isolation in a rural nineteenth-century context is intensified through her infantilising confinement to her bedroom for most of the long winters because Jordan forbids her a candle to light the terrible darkness downstairs. She is doubly dispossessed, of the natural world and her inheritance and patrilineality works in the play to privilege men and disadvantage women by transferring her wealth to Jordan after their marriage and legally preventing her from working the farm following his death. Consequently, the business deteriorates, she is unable to secure a good price for it, and after considering gifting it to anyone who will take it, it is only saved by Prosper's intervention, effectively confiscation, which returns it once again to male control. Along with law and marriage, Christianity is another logocentric institution under scrutiny in the play, notwithstanding its valorisation of good religious practice through a representative kindly Devon clergyman character. The play sympathises with Judith's isolation from and rejection of alienating masculinist Christian scripture, which offers her neither succour nor peace. She reproaches the 'god of the men!', crying out in her despair: 'you don't listen to a woman' (71)

and perceives God's austerity operating in Jordan's antipathy to social pleasures, observing that 'neither one's for dancing' (18). Anticipating Kristevan Lacanian-inflected conceptualisations of the unconscious feminine self as a potential threat to the status quo, in perpetual abeyance, Dane dramatises Judith's identification with a female semiotic incarnated in libertine pagan deity, Bacchus, in opposition to notions of a Godhood originating in a puritan-devolved patriarchal cultural tradition. Jordan counters her rebellious outbursts by accusing her of 'fits', of being 'mad for days with staring eyes, whites glinting' (69), and he uses her misery and furious deportment to his advantage by charging her with lunacy and witchcraft on account of her irreligious outlook and behaviour. The feminist subtext of the play suggests an alternative explanation, that she is a fully sane but disinherited woman, remonstrating against intolerable physical, social and cultural conditions. In this respect, it exudes a sense of female protest of the kind theorised in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's famous re-evaluation of female illness and madness in literature in *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

Women resisting patriarchal violence by making gender trouble for the masculine hegemony is also the topic of *Naboth's Vineyard* and *Herod and Mariamne*. *Naboth's Vineyard* is based upon the Old Testament tale of Naboth and Ahab, king of Israel, who is prevented from extending the gardens of his royal palace when Naboth refuses to sell him his adjoining vineyard. In the tale, Ahab's wife, Queen Jezebel, retaliates by trumping up a false charge of blasphemy against their incalcitrant neighbour, for which he is stoned to death. Three years later, after Ahab dies in battle, Jehu takes the throne by murdering the royal prince, Joram, and having Jezebel thrown from a window and eaten by dogs. As a gentile and Baal worshipper, flaunting her sexuality with elaborate self-adornments, Jezebel has become a cultural symbol for harlotry and the embodiment of patriarchal fears about women in Judeo-Christian history and more recently within the secular imagination, fired by Bette Davis' famous portrayal of her in William Wyler's 1938 film, *Jezebel*. Dane foreshadows Jezebel's entry into popular cinema, incarnating her for modern audiences thirteen years earlier than Wyler. As a feminist deconstruction of the original story, Dane's sympathetic portrayal of a doomed queen shares more in common with Shakespeare's representation of a hounded and dignified Cleopatra than with the darkly evil sorceress of the Old Testament. She is softened in several particulars. Her authorisation of Naboth's death and his subsequent execution are removed to an off-stage direction and the margins of the narrative, minimising their impact, and her bid for his vineyard is reasonably made when she offers to rent it rather than take it by force. Naboth is the less accommodating of the two bargain seekers, demanding that she seal the agreement by swearing to his Judeo God, when she clearly worships a different deity. The narrative perspective works in support of religious

pluralism, condoning and sympathising with Jezebel's minority-faith position, her belief in a female-identified deity. Although she had a personal faith in God, Dane was not a supporter of patriarchal religious doctrine and spoke out against the desecration of pre-Christian female paganism, referring her readers to 'accounts of the fierce persecution of wise and beautiful heathenisms', which 'make one ready to cry for the images defaced, the books burned, the lovely legends mutilated' ('Mother Night' 115) and 'the inevitable conclusion of self-absorbed humanity that other people's gods are abomination' she called 'darkness' (90). She privileged mystical power over patriarchal Christianity. Championing 'goddesses that care for women', in particular Isis, Egyptian goddess of magic (*Women's* 121), she challenged dogma 'in the religion and the law of the past unsuited to the needs of modern man' (112), criticising the 'defenders of our obsolete enactments' (16), the disciplinary and misogynistic elements of a brand of Christianity which Foucault later famously attacked as a source of dominant Western institutional metanarrative, heavily implicated in cultural and social control. Denying the masculine 'bloody' God of Israel who terrifies his believers, instead of worshipping Baal, as in the Old Testament story, Jezebel prays to Ashtoreth, the benign and exuberant Phoenician moon goddess representing gentle elements of nature, who she calls 'mother of life, mother of death' (*Naboth's* 76). In celebration of her female deity, she proffers alternative devotional rites, sensuous, vigorous and playful exhibitions of semiotic jouissance, 'gay sweet songs' and 'quick-foot dances' (*ibid.*).

Like Dane's other exceptional protagonists, Jezebel has an extensive capacity for protective love: for Jehu, with whom she falls in love following Ahab's death, for her female servant, Zillah (*Naboth's* daughter) and for her evidently inferior husband. While Ahab is one of Dane's characteristic sickly male effeminates, introduced, 'lying on a couch in the inner room [. . .] a stoutish, elderly man, listless, bowed' (*Naboth's* 19), Jezebel is a prototypical Dane heroine, modern and capable, and when the play came out, she was aptly described as 'a heroic and commanding figure making a last desperate struggle to retain the throne for her weak husband' (*The Yorkshire Post* Dec 9 1925). Highly successful in the public sphere, she becomes Ahab's politically potent deputy, the manager of his affairs of state. Greeting her on her return from a diplomatic journey, her son, Joram, joyfully proclaims: 'the world will go round smoothly as a chariot wheel new oiled, now that you are home again!' (*Naboth's* 15). Presiding at the court of justice, she redresses domestic gender-power imbalances, making judgements which favour women's rights over the unreasonable demands of their paterfamilias, and Dane's feminist standpoint on gender inequities in divorce legislation is specifically interpolated into the drama. Jezebel refuses a plaintiff's suit to rid himself of his spouse because she does not 'please' when she hears of his wife's oppressed circumstances, how 'what with the cooking and the cleaning

and the sweeping and drawing water, and making him his new clothes and mending him his old ones, I cannot make time to flatter him as I flattered before we were wed' (33). When Jehu repays Jezebel's affection with violent treachery, she meets the 'cries and trampling and shouting' of his soldiers who storm the city and rouse the people to demand her death (71) with courage and dignity, openly challenging his authority to the end. The play ends ironically, not with the triumph of God's will over paganism and affirmation of traditional Judeo-Christian lore, as in the original Old Testament tale, but with human reconciliation: Zillah and her young lover, Hiram, withdraw from the patriarchal atrocities that they have witnessed in the fatherland to live as the diaspora in a feminine space, 'a new country, in a kindly city by the cleanly sea!' (90), where Zillah grieves for her mistress and comes to forgive her for the part she played in her father's death. The play concludes with her anguished lament for her 'beautiful, proud queen!' (89), echoed by Hiram's accolade: 'once queen, once proud, once beautiful!' (ibid.), and this reinforces the principle narrative purpose – to elegise Jezebel's death and reinstate her into female history.

While Dane was the first dramatist to revisit Jezebel's story, the tale of Herod and Mariamne had been the subject of many stage adaptations by the time Dane's version was written in 1938. As a loose translation of Frederick Hebbel's 1850s German theatrical rendition of the urtext, Dane's is the first play to give voice to Palestinian princess, Mariamne, in order to show the devastating impact of Judeo-Christian patriarchal rule on women's lives. As 'a piece of property' (*Herod* 72), commodified by her possessive husband Herod, she lives in fear of death at his hands. Fallen out of favour with his powerful master, Mark Antony, Herod goes on a journey to Rome to plea for his life and before he departs, he stipulates that in the event of the failure of his suit, Mariamne should be put to death so she can accompany him in the afterlife. Returning safely, he plans another dangerous state visit, repeating his chilling proviso. Refusing to accept this tyranny over her and demonstrating her growing contempt for his authority, Mariamne throws a banquet to celebrate his death, even though she is fully aware that he is still alive and likely to break in on the feast when he arrives back at the palace. The festivities celebrate her emerging sense of definitive self-completion. Her customary feelings of fragmentation dissipate during the dancing and in an epiphanous moment of pre-symbolic self-recognition, she sees herself as whole in a court looking glass, and exclaims: 'there in the mirror! That is how I saw myself once, in a dream. Not a jewel is missing' (122–3). Newly confident on account of her authentic identity, she abandons herself to semiotic jouissance, declaring: 'I've not forgotten how to dance, and I shall dance tonight because I'm free again – widowed, divorced, anyway free' (113). At this instant, Herod returns, outraged by her unqueenly and non-subservient behaviour. In fear of her ascendant power, he decrees 'a woman

who can defy men as she does deserves to die' (145–6), and in accordance with Judeo-Christian patriarchal law, he pronounces her death sentence. During her trial, when she refuses to profess her innocence, preferring to perish rather than live under his ruthless control, Titus, a Roman commander at court, usually of her husband's misogynistic mind-set, cannot help but admire in spite of himself, her androgynous 'Roman courage', her 'hero's way of marching out of life as if this gorgeous world weren't worth a glance' (148). The play is self-consciously metatextual: watching Mariamne perform at the feast, Titus draws a parallel between Herod's disorderly queen and Dane's Jezebel, who 'painted her face and tired her head, but [. . .] was flung to the dogs in the end' (122). Indeed, there is a notable similitude between Mariamne and Jezebel's stories. Like Jezebel, Mariamne rules magnificently in her husband's absence, is regarded as a profane witch, 'possessed by devils!' (121) and is ultimately executed under patriarchal law.

Interpreting Literary History

During a post-war upsurge in anxieties related to English national identity, Shakespeare was regularly 'pressed into service as a reminder of what made this nation "great", especially in the work of the Old Vic Company' (D'Monté *British* 141). Yet when Dane's *Will Shakespeare* opened at Shaftsbury theatre in November 1921, running for sixty-two performances, it failed as an economic venture. An outbreak of flu is often given as the reason why audiences kept away,⁴ but aesthetic factors as much as practical causes, specifically the anachronistic quality of the play, may well have alienated modern theatregoers. Dane wrote it more 'for her own pleasure' than as a commercial proposition; as 'a Shakespeare snob' (Barrow 30), the Bard lay at the heart of her creative consciousness, and he is frequently mentioned in her fictional and non-fictional work as a yardstick of literary quality. Striving to recreate early modern English syntax and lexis, and emulate Shakespearian imagery and verse form, her play 'harks back to the antiquated school of the poetic drama' (Nicholl 434). Although not terribly popular at first, it subsequently became her most enduring drama however, revived periodically on the radio (Barrow 30) and adapted for the cinema, and according to Trewin, even though it 'failed to hold the London theatre, [it] had more genuine admirers than many a commercial "smash hit"' (125). These included George Bernard Shaw, who, impressed by its style and poetry, declared 'I am fortunate in seeing such a star rise before I die' (Barrow 34) and wrote in person to Dane to express his enthusiasm for the play, feeling 'so touched by it that I actually paid a man six shillings for a copy of the text' (*Correspondence with Bernard Shaw* n. p.). He reiterated this admiration in a further letter, commending the play's characters as 'very good indeed' and reassuring her of the high-quality of the work, that 'the commercial failure need not

worry you (unless you cannot afford it): there is not culture enough in London to boil so rare a pot for more than a fortnight at a time' (qtd. in Barrow 34–35). He simultaneously confessed his own demerits, professing, 'I [. . .] could not at your age have done at all what you have done so very well' (ibid.). The drama had other supporters, including Galsworthy, celebrated actress, Ellen Terry, and Heinemann reader, Charles Evans.⁵ It was heavily criticised in some quarters, however, for the liberties which were taken with the biographical details of Shakespeare's life, 'almost sacrilegious territory' at the time (Barrow 30). Indeed, the furore that followed the first performances of the play prompted a special meeting of the Shakespeare memorial National theatre committee which urged that 'a passionate appeal [. . .] a protest should be lodged against the play' (34). It was this which drew the attention of George Bernard Shaw to the production: after attending the meeting in person, he became 'determined that he must see the play which could arouse such polarised views' (ibid.). Particularly controversial for the time was a representational paradox which sees Shakespeare revered as a literary genius but also exposed as fallible and unmanly, effeminised by love and eclipsed in courage and resolve by the play's female characters. Born of Dane's conviction that men, even Shakespeare, are essentially weaker than women, her interpretation appealed to Shaw's pro-feminist inclinations. In his letter to her he wrote, 'you make a distinction between men and women, and as you represent women as complete human beings, you are forced to make the men incomplete to show the difference' (qtd. in Barrow 34). In St John Ervine's more conventional opinion, however, her feminist liberties overstepped the mark. Before *Granite* was to delight him with its masculine characters, he wrote a 'flagrantly sexist review' (Barrow 33), only conceding that it was as 'finely written' (ibid.) as one would expect from a writer of Dane's calibre, after being swayed by Galsworthy's enthusiastic review of the play.

The drama was written at a time when women playwrights were balancing the prevailing mood for a redefinition of English national identity with a post-suffrage consciousness of emerging possibilities for women to influence public life. To this end, their dramas capitalised on a 'renewed interest in key exceptional women from history, whose fame had come from their positions and roles within the public sphere' (Gale *West* 139). "'Modern" ordinary women' were invited to compare themselves with outstanding women from the past (170), who became new role models, unifying patriotism and feminism, awakening the public to a sense of female continuity and the presence of women's past activities outside the home. Many 'early-twentieth century feminists [. . .] tended to focus on Queen Elizabeth, seen as an exemplary, capable woman ruler whose intellect and strength of will equated any man's' (Cameron, 'Limits' 121), and reflecting this upsurge of national interest in England's famous Tudor queen, Dane incorporated her as one of the main characters in

Will Shakespeare, fusing her passion for the monarch, indulged in much of her writing,⁶ with an aspiration to promote her belief in the emotional superiority of women. In the play, Elizabeth is conceptualised as a modern figure, egalitarian, residing close to the 'noisy street' to be close to people (122), and professional, dedicating her life to the glory of England despite the fact that she really values human love over all else. She first encounters the young Shakespeare when, after leaving Stratford and Ann Hathaway to pursue a playwriting career in London, he becomes infatuated with one of her maids of honour, Mary Fitton; Dane's modelling of Fitton was popularly believed at the time of the play's conception to be the desirable 'dark lady' of Shakespeare's sonnets. When Christopher Marlowe, his playwriting collaborator and 'brother-in-art' (74) also falls in love with Mary and his feelings are reciprocated, an angry exchange of words between the two men ends in a knife tussle in which Marlowe is accidentally stabbed to death. Including a feminist dimension to the narrative, Dane draws a direct contrast between masculine impetuosity and violence which too easily breaks male bonds and allegiances and causes war, and the maturity, diplomacy and supportiveness of female friendships. This is articulated by Shakespeare; beholding Marlowe lying dead at his feet, he wails 'Oh, what a dumb and measureless gulf divides/Star from twin star, and friend from closest friend!/Women, they say, can bridge it when they will' (79). While Shakespeare is too broken hearted to rouse himself, Mary flees the scene in an act of self-preservation which contrasts with his weakness of spirit. The action now shifts from the theatre and local inn to the royal court, presided over by Queen Elizabeth, who banishes Mary for her suspected part in Marlowe's death but spares Shakespeare, persuading him to cease fretting over Mary and concentrate his efforts wholly on the fulfilment of his creative genius so that he can write her a comedy to entertain visiting foreign dignitaries. His relationship anxieties are merely transferred to marital guilt, however, manifested in Ann's ghostly voice, persistently calling him home. The play closes with his resolve to return to his wife when he is old and his writing career is over.

Dane suggests that Shakespeare's greatest works would not have been written without the influence of Elizabeth's guidance and mentorship and Mary's role as his muse or 'sister-in-art' (74), who, as he acknowledges, 'breathed' the lines of *Romeo and Juliet* 'into my heart long ere I wrote them down' (*Will* 76). She is the unsung creative female force intrinsic to Dane's conception of exceptional women who shaped literary history. The antithesis of Ann Hathaway, the traditional womanly wife who crumbles without her husband, she fulfils a dual feminist role in the play. The co-creator of Shakespeare's prodigious literature, she is also Dane's ubiquitous commanding female actress, a figure who features centrally throughout her work. When the young boy actor who plays Juliet breaks his arm on stage and lies 'moaning and wincing' and 'swears he can't go

on' (75), she retorts 'baby-men!' (ibid.), takes his place and when one of the players wonders 'What! A woman play on the stage?', she ripostes, 'Ay, when the men fail!' (76). Relishing this opportunity for role reversal, she mirrors modern women in the process of assuming traditionally masculine responsibilities, in place of war-damaged men who were no longer emotionally, mentally and physically able to function. As her performance brings the house down, Marlowe exclaims admiringly, 'there goes a man's master!' (ibid.). As Queen Elizabeth's middle-class counterpart, she is a model of modern womanhood, encouraging the female audience to seize emerging opportunities in professional and public life.

As they 'focussed upon the public roles held by women' in history (D'Monté *British* 145), some female playwrights singled out the Brontë sisters as ideal candidates for reappraisal. This coincided with a cultural period of Brontë mania, an inter-war 'obsession' which involved a 'rise in critical research on their works' (Humble 176–7) and a national surge of fascination with their literary, cultural and personal lives. This was evident from the huge crowds which attended the opening of the Brontë parsonage in Haworth as a museum in 1928, following which 'no dramatist seemed to be happy unless he had a Brontë play in the bag' (Trewin 130). Eight of these were produced in 1933 alone (Graves and Hodges 292) and that was the year Dane contributed to this literary craze with *Wild Decembers*, named after a line in Emily Brontë's 1846 poem, 'Remembrance'.⁷ Running for fifty performances at the Apollo in 1933, it is the only Brontë production to make it into Gale's 'Table' of key plays by women on the London stage between 1917–1959 (West 198–237) and it was highly regarded by press journalists, one of whom described it as 'pure genius' ('Modern Drama' *Rugby Advertiser* December 11, 1942).⁸ Paying it a mixed-compliment by referring to it as the 'best of a gloom of Brontë chronicles', Trewin also found it 'the most scholarly, the most theatrical' of the plays on this topic, and noted its 'truthful, discerning' qualities (130); this sense of biographical accuracy was identified elsewhere in the press.⁹ The drama's verisimilitude is perhaps attributable to its sources. These comprised Charlotte Brontë's semi-autobiographical 1853 novel, *Villette*, many of whose passages are closely adapted in the play, and Elizabeth Gaskell's 1857 biography: *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*,¹⁰ the first collection of correspondence between various members of the Brontë family and their friends and publishing contacts, interspersed with Gaskell's personal recollections of her friendship with its chief subject. Dane represents Charlotte and her gifted sisters as quietly determined, professional and independent, paying tribute to their importance as writers who used 'the novel to prize apart the bars between them and emotional freedom' (*Tradition* 41). Her interpretation anticipates twenty-first century post-feminist interpretations of the Brontë legend: Juliet Barker's *The Brontës: a life in Letters* and Sally Wainwright's acclaimed 2016 BBC bio-pic, *To Walk Invisible*. Wainwright's reproduction of the strong work

ethic of the sisters, compared with Branwell's shiftlessness, corresponds with Barker's reflection that the sisters 'had always been conscious of the importance of being able to earn their own livings', but their brother degenerated by the end of his life into 'simply a drunken sot, barely capable of writing coherently, even to his closest friends' (191) and 'that duty seems never to have been instilled' (ibid.). Dane makes the same point in *Wild Decembers*. She also anticipates Wainwright's treatment of the sisters' mutual supportiveness, how they exemplified Dane's vision of female community, with 'ranks close against anyone, even their own father, who is outside the triple alliance' (*Wild* 10) and the ways in which their publication strategy operated to benefit the three women equally, apparently devoid of any negative sibling rivalry. There is one important difference between Wainwright's post-feminist production and Dane's pre-second wave play, however. Indicative of the paradoxical nature of inter-war feminism, *Wild Decembers* attributes the writing of the original manuscript of *Wuthering Heights* to Branwell, not Emily. This falsification held currency in the inter-war period, consistent with hegemonic tendencies which Dane appears to have internalised to perceive genius as a male attribute. Notwithstanding this betrayal of Emily's creativity, *Wild Decembers* contains multiple intimations of feminism in its focus on Charlotte's proto-feminist professionalism, her determination to infiltrate the masculine literary marketplace. Embodying a characteristically modern form of exceptional womanhood, she applies imagination, intellect and work ethic to her authorial career while remaining mindful of the value of Victorian codes of seriousness and responsibility. Directly adapted from Gaskell's 'self-contained [. . .] self-reliant and independent character' (Barker *A Life* 201), she may be 'shy' but is also 'inflexible' (*Wild* 62) in her ambition for herself and her sisters, quite unable to 'rest till others are shown' Emily's poems (45), and contemptuous of critics who undermine Brontë writings, calling one a 'pompous ass!' (53). The play affirms her dignity through its representation of her attachment to Professor Constantin Heger, tutor at the school in Brussels where Emily and Charlotte were pupils and Charlotte was later a school mistress. Their liaison is configured as a true modern meeting of minds, as Charlotte explains to a Belgian priest in a scene borrowed from Villette. 'I love him' she declares, 'as I love a faithful friend. But love him as you mean when you say love – no!' (23). Heger's reciprocation of her regard endows her with worth: saddened by her decision to leave Brussels, he confides, 'I am hurt that you go. It takes away, I won't say my right hand, but I do say [. . .] the little finger of it' (27), and he ultimately curtails their correspondence on account of his wife's disapproval, not a cooling of his feelings. Charlotte responds stoically to this, resolutely tearing up his final letter to draw a line under their attachment (38), and henceforth she reserves all her love and grief for her dying sisters. This quality of self-possession is reinforced by her composed acceptance of her own death.

Charlotte's poise is drawn in sharp contrast to Branwell's inelegant histrionics, consistent with Dane's distinctive strategy of reducing the stature of her male characters in order to emphasise the exceptionality of her female heroines. Incompetent, lacking in self-determination, wasteful of his education, a 'whimpering' failure (*Wild* 57), he is emotionally subordinate to Charlotte, who addresses him using strong imperatives, such as 'you *must* earn credentials again' (8), is contemptuous towards him on occasion and according to Emily 'hard on' him (9), but nevertheless eager to encourage him back to health and writing. The complete breakdown of his mental health is drawn in opposition to the psychological and emotional superiority of all the sisters and Charlotte in particular, staunchly resolute in the face of trial and hardship. While she meets her estrangement from Heger and her illness and death with fortitude, following Branwell's own romantic rejection, by his employer's widow, Mrs Robinson, he demonstrates an utter lack of control, descending into irreversible alcohol addiction. To expose his want of integrity, Dane dramatises the full details of his affair even though, bearing in mind the critical moral indignation which met Gaskell's choice to publish Charlotte's correspondence on the subject,¹¹ this is a risky modern approach. The other male protagonists, Patrick Brontë and Charlotte's future husband, Arthur Nicholls, are also subject to a feminist treatment. Although Patrick corresponds to the 'forward-looking social reformer' delineated in Peggy Hewitt's recent 'widely regarded [. . .] definitive account' of the lives of the Brontës, *These Lonely Mountains* (qtd. in Knights), Charlotte is in full charge of him. In poor health, low spirits, and nearly blind, he is obliged to comply with her decision to marry against his will and faced with her prevailing determination, he 'retires a defeated man' while she 'remains triumphant [. . .] going over her successful retorts' (*Wild* 88). The play dramatises their relationship as between daughter and fond father who respects and admires her and this is an authentic representation, evidenced in Patrick's correspondence. In his 1850 letter to Charlotte's publisher, George Smith on the topic of a newly commissioned portrait of his illustrious daughter, for instance, he pays homage to her brilliance, exclaiming, 'I may be partial, and perhaps, somewhat enthusiastic, in this case, but in looking on the picture [. . .] I fancy I see strong indications, of the Genius, of the Author, of 'Shirley', and 'Jane Eyre' (Barker *A Life* 289). Arthur is also constructed as Charlotte's inferior. Gauche, comic even, he blunders his way into her initially unwanted affections with inept gestures of romantic courtship and is liable 'perpetually to do something clumsy or say something ill-judged' in her adulated presence, accidentally knocking over and smashing Emily's writing desk, for instance (*Wild* 41). Charlotte's sense of his effete benevolence, unappreciated by the local community, is tinged with a sense of pity. Intrinsic to the reconsideration of masculine role in women's middlebrow writing was a re-evaluation of romance, and the

'companionate partnership' (Humble 220), the 'antithesis' of romance (215) was an emerging new marriage model which began to replace the 'wholly admiring picture of English masculinity such as thrilled the readers before the war' (Light 170). Accepting that she and Arthur 'are not going to be romantics' (*Wild* 90), Charlotte becomes the dominant partner in a companionable marriage of this type that her modern female audience would have recognised and presumably approved.

In Rachel Ferguson's Brontë drama, *Charlotte Brontë*, also produced in 1933, the female literary protagonists are notably less self-determined than in *Wild Decembers*. Bearing in mind the fact that before the Great War, Ferguson was 'a fierce campaigner for women's rights and considered herself a suffragette', and that she became 'a leading member' of the WSPU, (Crawford n.p.) this is suprising and perhaps situates her alongside the many other female writer-activists who back-tracked from feminist positions in the inter-war period. Ferguson's play opens with a framing 'prologue' set in the 1920s, comprising a series of interchanges between various visitors to Haworth's newly opened Brontë museum who attempt to make sense of the lives of the enigmatic sisters. One of them is a discerning vicar who bemoans the cultural trivialisation of their life story, altered beyond recognition through the cumulative effect of numerous modern re-evaluations and re-interpretations of their history. Another of the visitors agrees. 'The more they are written up,' she remarks, 'the more people expect, and then they fall back on dissection and disparagement' (*Charlotte* 21). Ironically, Ferguson's play itself takes liberties with the truth of letters, diaries and witness accounts, mostly those recorded in Gaskell's *Life*. Although Ferguson's 'Author's note' (n.p) alludes to the Brontë sisters' 'many biographers', these are not specified, and the sources of her play are unclear. Liberated from the constrictions of biography, Ferguson writes a fanciful, melodramatic drama which is markedly less nuanced and ideologically feminist than *Wild Decembers*. In all likelihood, its intention is laudable – to expose a male-controlled family destroying its gifted women – yet it reads as a somewhat patriarch-friendly representation, aggrandising the male characters in the Brontë story, reducing the sisters to victims and diminishing their literary triumphs. The energy of the male protagonists dominates the play. While Dane's Nicholls is bumbling and foolish, Ferguson's curate is in full command of his life. Intellectual and active, he is too important in the parish to spare much time for Charlotte, who is reduced to a spouse in waiting. Similarly, Patrick is diametrically opposed to Dane's sickly intellectual. A powerful zealous bully, brimming with religious intolerance, frequently sermonising on sin and given to ranting at Branwell and shooting birds, he functions primarily to emphasise the fear and timidity of the sisters, Ann in particular, who he persistently goads. Branwell is poles away from the snivelling, self-pitying victim of *Wild Decembers*. His demeaning relationship with Mrs Robinson is elliptical and as a result

he cuts a more dignified figure than in Dane's play. Intellectual, articulate, romantic and poetic, he appears deserving of his status as head of the household and justified in his subordination of his sisters. Before his health deteriorates, he is, as Charlotte affirms, 'the pride of us all, and our hope' (32).

The Brontë women on the other hand, are weaker characters, far removed from the private, practical, good humoured and intellectual characters of Dane's drama. Emily is a quasi-spiritual mystic and references to her supernatural experiences and longings for earthly extinction which purport to explain the elemental mysteries of *Wuthering Heights* make a crackpot of her. In regular psychic communication with an invisible divine lover who foretells her doom and lures her to other-worldly union and the fulfilment of a death wish, she returns from the moors one day, muttering, 'I can't come to you to-day, my love. I've got to die first, you know' (*Charlotte* 65). Although more grounded in the real world than Emily, Ann and Charlotte are debased by their subordination to masculine influence and their anxieties and vulnerabilities born of psychological damage done to them by their father and brother. Charlotte is the antithesis of Dane's feminist-identified heroine. Powerless to control Patrick's masculine excesses, at one point in the play, she is 'white and trembling' before him (38), and despite some skilful verbal jousting with Branwell, reminiscent of Jane Eyre's cerebral repartee with Rochester, she is unable to counter his incessant misogynistic taunting: 'all women's instincts are domestic' (30) and 'this cursed house is run by old women for old women' (38). His rebellious and sardonic discourse signposts a spirited intellectual heroism which is privileged in the narrative over Charlotte's disapproving, stiff and inhibited rejoinders, and focalised through his perception, she is reduced to a Galatian figure, still, passive, 'grave and austere as a Florentine Madonna' (32), the perfect sitter for his paintings of idealised and objectified womanhood. Her romantic entanglement with Heger is a hopeless unrequited passion. Childishly under his thrall, she 'breaks down, sobbing' in anticipation before she opens one of his letters (44) and plagues him with correspondence 'many times [. . .] begging, reproaching, imploring for even a line, however brief' (63). Quiet when it would be judicious to protest, when self-possession is in order, all emotional equilibrium fails her. Furthermore, her reasons for marrying Nicholls, to end her condition of spinsterhood and gain a more respectable identity as a wife are gender-politically regressive, and Charlotte Brontë's real and well-documented confidence and economic aspiration is exchanged in Ferguson's fictionalised account for a sense of inferiority and desire for marriage to effect her self-completion. When Nicholls proposes, she replies: 'I couldn't [. . .] come to you penniless. [. . .] I don't believe in wives being a drag on their husbands. It makes them sly, and loses them self-respect' (*ibid.*). While Dane's Charlotte dies in full command of her mental and intellectual faculties, Ferguson's death-bed scene serves to confirm the importance of social conformity to Charlotte's sense

of identity. Her mind becomes deranged and registers her deep-seated anxieties that she has failed to abide by received codes of womanly behaviour. Exclaiming, 'what a failure I've been!', she re-visits her unsuccessful personal and professional life, revealing that she 'wrote the books [. . .] to solace my disgrace!' (85–86), that the primary motivation for her literary career has been, not creative impulse or professional ambition, but a compulsion to assuage the opinion of the parish, which marked her out as an 'ageing unattractive spinster' before her marriage raised her in its estimation (ibid.). Charlotte's financial independence and writing success is thus undermined by Ferguson's internalisation of cultural misogyny which denies her heroine the personal courage and pride in her achievements for which she is now renowned, which Dane foregrounds in *Wild Decembers*.

Cameron argues that in the course of the 1920s and 1930s, plays by women become increasingly less progressive and 'whereas the earlier plays tend to present their female protagonists as free agents, able to perceive injustices and to fight against them, the later plays present their female protagonists as "subjected beings" in the grip of powers beyond their perception or control' ('Limits' 110). This is certainly the case with *Charlotte Brontë* and Dodie Smith's plays, which are unable or unwilling to imagine female identities outside traditional limits. Smith makes light of serious issues, reinforcing conservative agendas in relation to gender roles and gender power, modelling women through binary configurations that define them as either married and fulfilled or on the shelf and miserable, as sexless and laughable or sexy and attractive, and both playwrights fail to recognise what Cameron calls 'the warped or limiting effects of patriarchal ideology on women's consciousness' (111). Stern is more equivocal, revealing a sense of inter-war feminist confusion by dramatising opportunities for her heroine, Daryll, but suggesting that the ideal situation is to revert to a traditional role. Exploring the work of these three women usefully highlights the contrasts between their dramas and Dane's more feminist-invested plays, which are free of any anxiety about the ramifications of conferring power on women and whose heroines are divested of all traditional comic requirements to perform guileful femininities to entertain audiences and placate the status quo. Sydney is transformed from carefree flapper socialite to responsible household head in much the same way as Daryll, but she avoids reverting to womanly type at the close of her story. While it is intimated that Daryll relinquishes her professional role, Joan retains control of her business at the end of hers, and while Janet's sexual self-sacrifice is pathetic, Shirley Pryde's is heroic. Ferguson's Charlotte is a victim, Dane's Charlotte a role model.

By restricting their reading of her work to *Bill of Divorcement*, the earliest and so least overtly feminist of Dane's inter-war plays, Cameron and D'Monté overlook the quiet revolution in her dramas, which become more strident the more she comes to grasp the intricacies of the gender

ideologies which have historically constrained women. A vision and confidence about writing about women develops gradually over the course of her dramatic work, becoming fully established towards the end of the inter-war period. By utilising history, she explores what women were capable of in difficult conditions and suggests how much more they could achieve and hope for in the improved circumstances of the modern world. In plays set in her own time, even in the somewhat gender-vexed *Bill of Divorcement*, she demonstrates inter-war feminist possibilities for single women which other playwrights ignore, and her perspective aligns her with a truth which other women playwrights of the period ignore: that 'a cohort of stay-at-home wives and mothers could never have achieved for women what this generation of spinsters did in meeting the challenge of grief and loss', that 'for them, being denied marriage was a liberation and a launching pad' (Virginia Nicholson qtd. in D'Monté 'Passion' 234–5). Appositely, although Cameron and D'Monté overlook Dane's validity as a feminist cultural observer, both conclude their key essays on the role of women in inter-war drama with quotations from Dane which ironically reveal about her what they don't acknowledge. Cameron closes 'The Limits of Imagination' by citing *The Women's Side*: '[I]t is just at this point that some of us, here or there, are beginning to crave for a pause in our progress, for a breathing-space in which to look about us and consider what it is that we have gained' (*Women's* 17). In 'Gender, War and Nationalism', D'Monté quotes Dinah, the main protagonist of Dane's 1940 play, *Cousin Muriel*, speaking of the implications of the coming Second World War, how 'whoever wins, it's a smashing, a shifting. We're standing over earthquakes and the ground feels like jelly. All our values are changing, not from year to year, but from minute to minute' (*Cousin* 92). Dane's reflectiveness about growing prospects for women in the modern world, her excitement about feminist advances made and her preoccupation with transcendence and forward movement attest to her significance to women's theatre scholarship.

Notes

1. Her 1934 play, *Come of Age*, for instance, is unusual in construction, a supernatural musical drama as unconventional as *Adam's Opera*. Dramatising the death of Thomas Chatterton in the eighteenth century and ghostly return to the present day 1930s, it examines the contrast between his romantic preconceptions and the more cynical outlook of the inter-war period, by comparing his use of lyrical speech patterns which carry his outmoded values with the colloquial speech of the emancipated modern women protagonists.
2. Although she was engaged to Elsie Arnold's brother, the engagement was short lived and she subsequently became closer to Elsie. After this, marriage seemed out of the question, either because of the lack of men following the war or because of the queerness of her sexuality.

3. Dane was fascinated by Nelson, publishing *The Nelson Touch: an Anthology of Lord Nelson's letters*, in 1942 with Heinemann.
4. This was the case according to Dane and reiterated by Douglas Fairbanks who starred in the play in 1985 (Barrow 87).
5. Galsworthy declared 'this is the richest, most imaginative blank verse we have had on the stage since Shakespeare's own day' (qtd in Barrow 33, and *Melbourne Advocate* May 3 1934), theatre critic, Graham Sutton, described it as 'a lovely, haunting thing' (qtd in Barrow 35), Terry called it 'a great play' (qtd in Barrow 35) and Evans hailed it as the 'flower of your poetic genius', destined to survive 'as a piece of literature long after I- and future generations – have gone' (St John 224).
6. Dane's nationalistic plays centring on Elizabeth 1 comprise: *Queen Elizabeth 1* (1941), a short vignette which features the famous speech which Dane utilised in many of her writings as an anthem to women's essential superiority: 'I know I have the body of a weak, feeble woman; but I have the heart of a king', 'The Light of Britain' (1942), *The Saviours* a collection of seven patriotic plays, one of which was intended to raise public morale during the Second World War and *The Lion and the Unicorn* (1943) with a romantic subtext relating to Elizabeth's relationship with the Earl of Essex. After the war she wrote a second Elizabeth-focussed romantic drama, *Till Time Shall End* (1958), about the queen's relationship with Robert Dudley. She also wrote a poem: 'The Heart', for her collection, *Trafalgar Day 1940 And Others* (1940), emphasising Elizabeth's role in the war between England and Spain in order to galvanise national courage in the face of Hitler's threats to modern England.
7. 'Remembrance': Stanza 3 reads:
Cold in the earth – and fifteen wild Decembers,
From those brown hills, have melted into spring:
Faithful, indeed, is the spirit that remembers
After such years of change and suffering!
8. It was described as 'perhaps the best which has been written' on the sisters (*Sheffield Daily Independent*, 2 Jan 1933), and Dane was praised for her ability to make such a success out of a drama about 'those three widely differing sisters' ('Modern Drama' *Rugby Advertiser*, Dec 11, 1942)
9. One wrote, 'Miss Dane has left the facts very much as they were, and [. . .] those people who like the truth and nothing but the truth will be thoroughly satisfied' (*Sheffield Daily Independent*, 2 Jan 1933).
10. Evidence that Dane went directly to Gaskell's text includes the fact that she quotes verbatim Patrick's words 'girls, do you know Charlotte has been writing a book, and it is much better than likely?' which Gaskell recalled from her memory of the family and documented exclusively in her book (Gaskell 230; Dane 60). She also reproduces Gaskell's personal account of the lead up to Charlotte's wedding where her friend, Margaret Wooler, 'volunteered to give her old pupil away' after Patrick desists (Gaskell 395; Dane 97). It is likely that Dane chose to reproduce this scene because of its pro-feminist significations.
11. In her 1908 introduction to Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, May Sinclair relates how Gaskell 'resented the charge of coarseness' (ix) made against Charlotte, by influential fellow writer Mrs Oliphant in particular (x). Mrs Oliphant berates Gaskell for including letters which expose Branwell's immoderate behaviour and shocking decline, and calls her decision to publish them 'nervous' and 'ill-considered' (qtd. In Sinclair x).

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3 Imperilled Identities and Submerged Sexualities

Romantic Pathology in the Coming-of-Age Novel, 1917–1927

Dane's first novels, *Regiment of Women* (1917), *First the Blade* (1918) and *Legend* (1919), all well-received by critics when they were first published,¹ centre on imaginative young women with modern struggles and anxieties reflecting the experiences of their counterparts in Dane's dramas, with forays into love, teaching, painting and writing which echo the adventures of their author. Caught between Victorian and Edwardian moral codes and emerging modern gender philosophies, their heroines are obliged to negotiate the social forces which impinge upon and shape their identities. Nicky Hallet suggests that a comment in Dane's obituary in *The Times*, 'the drama she did not write [. . .] she found in daily living which she shared with innumerable friends' ('Miss Clemence Dane' 17), is a coded reference to the total absence from her fictional oeuvre of depictions of her lesbian life. Yet, matching the profile of inter-war female writers identified by Elizabeth Maslen who aimed to persuade 'readers to engage with radical ideas, while sustained by familiar conventions' (36) and 'supplied entertainment for those who looked only for entertainment, but also offered signals' that the text 'could then be read at another subversive or polemical level' (37–38), Dane's lesbian drama *was* written, in *Regiment of Women* and *Legend*. Although these texts make anguished attempts to sanction womanliness, affiliate themselves with received codes of moral decency and affirm heterosexual romance, surface messages are problematized by covert parallel or submerged narratives featuring lesbian-identified heroines battling against the cultural dictates of what Adrienne Rich calls 'compulsive sexuality' (631), whose unsatisfactory marriages fail to alleviate the poignancy of their tragic lesbian storylines and which undermine the heterosexual romantic resolutions and complicate the overriding textual perspective. They are committed to the rights of women: *Regiment of Women* argues for educational reforms to benefit girls and vigorously defends spinster teachers, drawing readers' attention to the economic privations they endure, and *Legend* points to the tragic implications of one woman's decision to give up her career as a novelist. Written in the confident spirit of alternative domestic modernism, *First the Blade* diverges to a greater degree

from patriarchal ideological investments than both of these other novels, rejecting their models of femininity and marriage which they strive, albeit unconvincingly, to promote. Notwithstanding its abandonment of lesbian plotting, *First the Blade* is more progressively dedicated to the psychological growth, independence and fulfilment outside of marriage of the central female protagonist. While the rebellions in *Regiment of Women* and *Legend* are short-lived, *First the Blade* establishes a narrative pattern which continues in all of Dane's subsequent writings – the quest of the idealised female protagonist for her autonomous self in defiance of the tyrannies of the patriarchal home. The themes of these early novels reflect the preoccupations of Dane's female writer-contemporaries, who similarly grapple with the 'confusions' of the 'cultural moment' pertaining to female sexual identity, very often in relation to nonheterosexuality (Light 2). This is the particular focus of *Challenge* by Vita Sackville-West (1924), *Dusty Answer* by Rosamond Lehmann (1927), *Well of Loneliness* by Radclyffe Hall (1928), *More Women than Men* by Ivy Compton-Burnett (1933) and *Olivia* by Dorothy Strachey (1949).

Lesbian Loss: The Amor Impossibilia

According to Briganti and Mezei, included among the 'domestic spaces' of inter-war women's novels, are 'non-traditional ideas of home such as scientific laboratories, prison cells, the family car [. . .] gardens' as well as 'rest homes and boarding schools' (19). Baldick also notes the popularity of schools as narrative spaces during the inter-war era which witnessed 'a flourishing of education novels' (Baldick 192). Also known as school novels, these explored the pressures exerted by boarding establishments upon their pupils and were often unsettling reads with accounts of school experience which struck an authentic note at variance with the reassuring fairy tales promulgated in the normative and cheerful school stories written for younger readers, principally Angela Brazil's novels, such as *The Fortunes of Phillipa* (1906) and Dorita Fairlie Bruce's *Dimsie* series (1921–1941). In contrast to their profusion of fantasy prototypes of 'sanity and health' (Cadogan 192), *Regiment of Women* is a domestic novel belonging to the more uncomfortable adult subgenre. The narrative events, like the plotline in 'The Valiant Little Tailor' and *Adam's Opera*, communicate a modern pessimism which was recognised on publication, at which time the novel was admired as 'representative of modern introspective fiction' and 'free from all touch of unhealthy sentiment' ('A Remarkable' *Scrapbook*). Its verisimilitude was widely applauded in the international press; including the *Melbourne Advocate*, whose columnist, J.V.C. enthusiastically declared, 'I make no apologies for my superlatives when I say that this book is, without question, the finest and most masterly story of school life [. . .] that I have ever read' (May 3 1934). The main protagonist of the text, Clare Hartill, is a dynamic, attractive and

powerful senior teacher at an old-fashioned boarding school for girls. Many there adore her, including a candid ingenuous young teacher, Alwynne Durand, and a gifted pupil, Louise Denny. The narrative is structured in two halves. The first centres on the claustrophobic classrooms of the school, wherein Alwynne and Clare form a mutual but dysfunctional romantic relationship and Louise, becoming infatuated with Clare Louise ultimately commits suicide. In the second half, the narrative shifts to Compton Dene, an idyllic rural village and country seat of the Lumsden family, where Alwynne, racked by a sense of misplaced guilt over Louise's death, retreats following a nervous breakdown. The different outcome of the two halves marks a transformation in genre: as Alwynne heals and Roger Lumsden woos her away from Clare, the tragic mood dissipates and the text assumes the features of romantic comedy. The optimism of the happy outcome is somewhat tainted, however, by the irascible memory of Louise's death and Alwynne and Clare's failed love.

A common feature of girls' school stories was dormitory love, often loosely homosexual in nature. In Brazil's *The Patriotic Schoolgirl*, for instance, 'girls were always falling madly in love with one another, and occasionally with older women and innumerable friendships "flamed to red heat"' (Cadogan 122). All was kept 'firmly on a sentimental plane' however, there was 'no suggestion of the physical', and according to Cadogan, the lesbian undercurrents did not appear problematic to author or reader (ibid.). Indeed, the 'idealised love for an older, publically successful woman' (Vicinus qtd. in Horner 14) was not historically discouraged in boarding schools; it was generally 'accepted as a normal part of growing up' (Horner 15) and seen as 'a very common fact' ('New Novels' *New Statesman*. *Scrapbook*). The 'passionate hero-worship of a mistress or school fellow', known in German as 'schwärmerei' (Barrow 18), was considered the chief subject of *Regiment of Women* by its early critics but although female sexuality is represented as decidedly problematic and painful, many took the old-fashioned view that the schwärmerei was nothing more than the harmless prelude to married love, and the novel 'deals with that phase in a good many young and emotional girls' lives, which, known to every school and college and convent, leads them before they have met the one man, and while sex is mostly a sealed book, to adoration of some older girl or woman' ('Turning Over' *Scrapbook*). With the exception of *The Saturday Westminster Gazette*, which refers to Clare's 'perverted sex instinct' (*Scrapbook*), most reviews overlooked Clare and Alwynne's adult relationship and all but one focussed instead on Louise's tragic infatuation, viewing this as the novel's primary concern. Where the teacher protagonists were discussed, their liaison was interpreted as a chaste example of 'women's friendship' (*Sunday Times*. *Scrapbook*), and the novel, thought to deal with 'the thoughts and emotions of women' ('*Regiment of Women*' *Atheneum*. *Scrapbook*), was situated at the non-sexual pole position of what Adrienne Rich calls a

'lesbian continuum' (65), on which 'not all lesbian relationships may be fully embodied' (Faderman, *Surpassing* 17). Faderman favours a broad definition of lesbianism, defined by shared lives, strong emotions and affections, in which sexual contact may be entirely absent, and which was culturally acceptable before the First War and dramatised in Victorian and Edwardian female-authored literature as 'romantic friendship' (Faderman, *Chloe* xiii) with 'no intended implication of lust' (Tylee 172). Indeed, Alwynne's status as the favoured literary heroine is perhaps contingent upon an understanding between author, reader and critic that her relationship with Clare is romantic, not sexual. Although there is one reported passionate kiss between the two women, Alwynne is generally connoted as innocent and celibate. Statements which Dane made about her own life perhaps support this reading. In the 1930s, when the press intimated that she was sexually involved with other women, she vehemently denounced the allegations, protesting in an unpublished article that 'the thousands of normal, innocent – minded single women who find comfort and companionship in the society of their own sex have a right to protection against such fantastic and intolerable shadows of suspicion' (qtd. in Barrow 21). The testimonies of many of her friends, including Noel Coward who remarked, 'I think she is a little homosexual [. . .] but only in her mind [. . .] she didn't express her sexuality physically' (qtd. Barrow 19), also suggest that her own relationships, and by implication, her fictional representations of same-sex love, were celibate. However, 'both living and writing openly as a lesbian required an exceptional courage right through to the 1950s' (Wachman 40), and it is possible that to avoid getting herself into 'gender trouble' (Butler *Gender* 2540), Dane kept a homosexual life deeply hidden and Coward along with her other friends were complicit in her subterfuge. Her early aversion to media attention and publicity was certainly noted in the popular press,² and the fact that she ordered her literary executors to destroy all of her personal papers and information about her personal life on her death (Hamer 88) is perhaps suggestive of an uncomfortable secret. The terms of her will indicate very strong ties with the women who shared her life, first Elsie Arnold, to whom *Regiment of Women* is dedicated, and later, Olwen Bowen-Davies, to whom she bequeathed everything with the proviso that Arnold should be allowed to remain until her death in the home they once shared in St John's Wood (87).

Arguing that physical same-sex love in literature and in the life of the author is more common than was previously recognised, lesbian-critical discourse is interested in exploring positive narrative representations of writers' personal homosexuality along with textual denigrations of homosexuality written by nervous lesbians afflicted by reactionary sexual politics, self-loathing and lesbian panic. *Regiment of Women* is recurrently situated in the second category, variously evaluated as: 'one of the 'great Awful Warnings of anti-lesbian literature' (Hennegan, v), 'the

more openly homophobic texts of the early twentieth-century' (Castle, *Literature* 703), 'the most noxious of the lesbian vampire novels' (Faderman, *Chloe* 41), and a study of lesbian 'vampirism' (Tylee 171). In evidence, these critics cite the anxieties about the 'abnormal complications of the sex problem' which Dane raises in *The Women's Side* (67–68) and they contend that *Regiment of Women* was heavily determined by an anti-lesbian early-twentieth-century hegemony fuelled by Havelock Ellis and Krafft-Ebing's reactionary and newly popular sexology theories that were fast replacing the nineteenth-century consensus that female-to-female relationships were harmless, which continued to prevail in Brazil and Bruce's school novels.

Dane's lesbian agenda is personally rather than politically motivated, however. Through Louise and Alwynne, it is likely that she re-imagines her own difficult experiences of *schwärmerei*, first as a school girl at Wycombe Abbey, where she was so 'desperately unhappy and victimised by the other girls' on account of her crushes (Barrow 12) that she persuaded her father to remove her (Butcher 298), and later as a young teacher in Germany, infatuated with Fraulein Haentzschel, an older colleague on whom Clare is most probably modelled. Early reviews of the novel recognised this autobiographical element: that Clare 'must have had her semblance in the flesh for her author in the book to have seen her so intimately' ('A Book About' *Scrapbook*), and indeed Dane testifies in *The Women's Side* that a tendency to bully girls with crushes was common in schools (60), revealing to her friend, Fanny Butcher, that Utterbridge School was 'a composite picture of [schools] at which she had taught' (Butcher 298). Furthermore, her 'undated, bitter draft for an article' likely written during the early 1930s, describing 'the wrecking of a normal girl by an older abnormal woman [...] a vampire' (Barrow 21), appears to reflect her personal experience. So too does her discussion of a teacher acquaintance, disposed to 'amuse herself and gratify her love of excitement by playing on this tendency to exaggerated hero-worship in the children and mistresses under her care' (*Women's* 63–64). Lesbian-feminist psychoanalytic criticism, sympathetic to conflicted lesbian writers, is more germane to explorations of *Regiment of Women* than the negative model of lesbian panic propounded by Wachman, Henegan and Julien. Judith Butler's queer theory offers particularly useful insights. Advancing Freud's hypothesis of the Oedipal complex to provide a radical-feminist psychoanalytic interpretation of sexuality, Butler contends that the establishment of heterosexual identity in women involves a problematic repudiation of a more psychically authentic eternally beckoning homoerotic love, and the price of the cultural straightjacket imposed by compulsory heterosexuality is high for those with more fluid sexual selves and desires. The 'exorbitant' double cost is internal guilt and external sanctions (*Gender* 2538). It is plausible that given the homophobic context in which *Regiment of Women* was written, its author was affected by lesbian guilt,

what Freud called 'the dread of the community' (Butler *Psychic* 41) and that she held the single-sex atmosphere of her own schooling responsible for a perceived sexual failure, inducing in her the 'fear of homosexual desire in a woman [which] may induce a panic that she is losing her femininity, that she is not a woman, that she is no longer a proper woman, that if she is not quite a man, she is like one, and hence monstrous in some way' (136). This would explain *Regiment of Women's* absence of any critique of irresponsible cultural pressures which suppressed lesbian impulses and was responsible for the generation of sexual confusion in adolescent girls, and outward endorsements of the heterosexual fairy tale marriage as preferable to the alternative (lesbian) spinster pathway. Not patriotic or sentimental like popular school novels for girls, the novel nevertheless sanctions normative cultural requirements and expectations through its resolution based on normative heterosexuality, which resembles endings in Brazil and Fairlie Bruce's novels that tended to bury girls' career ambitions and make a 'sentimental equation of marriages with "happy endings"' (Cadogan 194).

To claim then that Dane's purpose in *Regiment of Women* was to betray her own homosexuality and condemn all lesbians in the process is, as Emily Hamer points out, 'an over-simple response' (84) to a novel which 'deserves rather more critical scrutiny than it has hitherto received' (88). The plot is less reactionary than has been claimed, particularly in relation to the fact that notwithstanding the narrative triumph of marriage over lesbianism, the most exonerated protagonists, Alwynne and Louise, are themselves lesbian-identified. Representing Alwynne as a lesbian version of the traditional angel-heroine, a model for a modern feminine identity which can accommodate desirable pre-feminist ideals, whose deviant sexuality does not impact on her high narrative status, problematises critical attempts to classify the novel as a simplistic piece of anti-lesbian rhetoric. Furthermore, it is 'Clare's habit of encouraging women's feelings for her, for the sake of idle amusement, that Dane sees as reprehensible, not her lesbianism *per se*' (85); exploring the workings of power and domination in one specific relationship is not tantamount to asserting a homophobic ideology. In punishing her self-centred protagonist, Dane may be guilty of subscribing to an anti-feminist doctrine which prevailed in the 1910s which held that for women it was 'selfish to become wrapped up in their own interests' and 'their ambitions should be related to social care' (Dyhouse 26), but it is Clare's selfishness, ruthlessness, careless abnegation of responsibility, lack of will to channel her ambition into genuine dedication to the welfare of the school and its pupils, and the jealous and possessive nature of her relationship with Alwynne which is morally reprehensible, not ipso facto her lesbianism. Furthermore, writing in a context in which, 'no book about lesbians for another fifty years would have a happy ending' (Hamer 84), Dane perhaps felt she had no choice but to pull Alwynne from the margins and

her relationship with Clare to the centre and marriage, and this would counter readings of the novel as engaging in 'a rhetorical plea for the *'expulsion from society* of the power-hungry, sexually frustrated spinster who preyed upon innocent younger women' (Vicinus 172). From another perspective still, Clare's defeat at the close of the novel does not necessarily signify anti-lesbian feeling. Lesbian critic, Terry Castle, unwittingly comes to Dane's defence here. She contends that the *pro-lesbian* novel (my italics) is 'almost always dysphoric in tendency', and 'male erotic triangulation' or the rivalry between two men for the affections of one woman, 'isolated or under assault [until] homosocial desire reasserts itself [when] the lesbian bond is broken, often in marriage' is typical of 'dysphoric lesbian counterplotting' which works to mourn the lesbian defeat (*Apparitional* 85–6).

Conversely, compared to the conclusion of other lesbian novels of the period, the resolution of Clare's story can be viewed as relatively positive. She bears a significant resemblance to Olive Chancellor, the main protagonist in *The Bostonians* by Henry James (1886), the 'first woman in mainstream Anglo-American writing to desire another woman and survive' (Castle *Apparitional* 177). In Castle's view, writing Olive's survival is an important pro-lesbian manoeuvre, indicative of James's 'sympathetic reading of a lesbian character' (ibid.). Clare is possibly the second fictional lesbian to live, and moreover to prosper, acquiring the Headship at Utterbridge and gaining a public identity as the published writer of a 'monogram on religion [. . .] a 'minor classic' (*Regiment* 96). This suggests a tentative narrative sympathy, empathy even, and the possible influence of James' writing on Dane's work. There are clear intertextual connections between *Regiment of Women* and *The Bostonians* in the parallel representations of the impact of Olive and Clare's sapphic loss, their shared final contemplations of the failure of their relationships, tinged with pain and remorse. When Olive loses Verena, 'the sense of regret for her baffled calculations burned within her like a fire [and] the misery [. . .] could express itself only [. . .] in a low, inarticulate murmur of anguish' (James 355). On coming to realise that 'Alwynne [. . .] was where she was because Clare had sent her, not because another had beckoned', Clare experiences a similar self-confrontational epiphany. She cries out 'piteously [. . .] "but why?" [. . .] "I loved her. What have I done?"' (*Regiment* 343) and 'turned within herself and reviewed her life [and] when the dawn came, she was still sitting there, thinking – thinking' (345). Dane's configuration of Clare's multivalence echoes *The Bostonians*, whereby we are 'free to regard Olive as morbid or unnatural if we wish [. . .] but James allows for a more humane response', creating a 'lesbian tragic space' (*Apparitional* 177, 178). If James's 'homoeroticism' predisposed him 'to a kind of imaginative identification with Olive Chancellor' (178), then perhaps Dane's culturally deviant sexuality worked the same way.

Clare's multiplicity was recognised at the time of the novel's publication and has been reluctantly acknowledged since. In 1917, *The Times Literary Supplement* alluded to 'the beauty and the attractiveness of her', saw her as 'a real woman, no nightmare, no Renaissance study in pure villainy', but 'generously, justly drawn' without 'touch of spite in the portrait' ('New Novels' *Scrapbook*) and praised Dane for her "'all-roundedness" of outlook upon human life' (ibid.). *Literary World* described her as a 'highly trained and competent university woman [with] a strong personality and will, brilliant intellectual gifts, great charm [. . .] emotionally sensitive, tremendously interested in her work [. . .] an ideal teacher, even an ideal woman' ('*Regiment of Women*' *Scrapbook*). 'Book Notices' remarked upon her psychological complexity, her 'very real affection' for Alwynne, objecting to Lumsden's calling her 'a poisonous female' on the grounds that she was 'much besides' (*Scrapbook*). Twenty years later the consensus had not changed; in 1937 Margaret Lawrence noted that 'the heroine is not treated as a melodramatic vixen, but as a woman in the grip of a complex psychiatric ailment' (368), suggesting perhaps that Clare's flaw is not physical vampiric lesbianism, but psychological intensity, possibly referring to her pathological jealousy which drives Alwynne away. Contemporary lesbian criticism has inadvertently conceded the deficiency of its interpretations. After professing that the novel 'perpetuates the demonised portrait of the single-woman teacher that sexologist discourse had been promoting since the 1890s', Heather Julien backtracks, admitting that Clare is 'a complex intellectual lesbian teacher who is often brilliant and dynamic in the classroom, who has human frailties and passions, and even the capacity for self-reflection' (Julien 119 120). Beginning by describing Clare as 'a fictional *archetype*' (vi) and '*symbol* of "unnatural passions"' (ix: my italics), Alison Hennegan then contradicts her own argument, admitting that candidly bringing to task, not homosexual women as a whole but certain types of lesbian, present in every lesbian community, the novel is 'one of the most fascinatingly complex and subtly observed psychological portraits of a particular sort of homosexual woman [. . .] utterly credible, even (dare we whisper it?) recognisable' (v-vi) Although she calls Clare a 'lesbian vampire', she recognises that her 'hunger' is not for blood and destruction, but 'for love', and it is the 'terror of the vulnerability love brings' which compels her to 'protect herself from the pain of loving by engaging in a ceaseless bid for emotional domination' (v). This suggests that Clare is exceedingly human, not extraordinarily monstrous. Gay Wachman's reading is similarly inconsistent; on the one hand she describes Clare as 'the *prototypical* lesbian vampire or demon lover in women's writing' (54: my italics); on the other, she praises the 'qualities that make Clare an inspiring teacher', citing her protectiveness and concern for justice within the school, evident when she 'rewards [. . .] Louise [. . .] for her industry and imagination and punishes Agatha for bullying' (58).

Hennegan contends that Dane endows Clare with admiral qualities and tragic status because the 'honesty of her own intelligence' causes her in effect to fail in her endeavour to show that 'heterosexuality is morally superior to homosexuality' (ix). Yet I would argue that the text *deliberately* seeks to fairly represent both sides, veering between a discourse which condemns Clare – iterated by Roger and Elsbeth – and one which defends her, voiced by Clare herself and supported by Alwynne, and on occasions the intrusive narrator. 'There are women to-day, old girls of the school', the reader is informed, 'who owe Clare Hartill the best things of their lives, their wide knowledge, their original ideals, their hopeful futures and happy memories: to whom she was inspiration incarnate' (*Regiment* 31). With modernist complexity, Clare's multiplicity is foregrounded – that 'the Clare remembered by her grateful former pupils is not the Clare that Elsbeth knew, that Alwynne learned to know, that Clare herself, one bitter night, faced and blanched at' – and concepts of stable identity are questioned: 'which of them had knowledge of the true Clare' enquires the narrator, 'who shall say?' (ibid.). Dane thus desists from simplistic judgements and rejects the confidence of the traditional realist text with its easy categorisations of good and evil. Narrative interjections are used sparingly, however; the text is generally more marked by a modernist narrative transparency which confers on it a sense of psychological realism and Dane 'makes no treatise of it. [. . .] She leaves it to tell its own story' (Lawrence 369). Hence, 'vampire' is not the narrator's label, but Elsbeth's, and any vampirism is reciprocal: the girls sap Clare's energy as much as she sucks their strength. Preparing them for their exams, she is 'entirely willing to devitalize herself on their behalf', becoming 'slack, gaunt, debilitated' in the process (*Regiment* 99). Her charm operates not to seduce the pupils but to get the best work out of them, at some physical cost to herself. She is not ruthlessly ambitious either: accepting the headship at the close of the novel, she considers her promotion poor compensation for losing Alwynne whom 'she had come to love [. . .] deeply and enduringly' (67). She quite reasonably points out that 'egoist', a label which suits her as she perfectly admits, is 'not a synonym for murderess!' (85). She is also genuinely upset by the emotional poverty of Louise's family life, and although she somewhat heartlessly admonishes the girl for her academic failures and disappointing performance in the school play at the point when kindness might have saved her life, she is unaware of the gravity of Louise's psychological condition and unwittingly, not deliberately, overlooks her suffering. Haunted by her eventual suicide, unbeknown to the other mourners, she writes 'with love' on a card that she places at the girl's graveside (192), revealing an affection for her tragic pupil which is kept from the enemies who are perhaps too quick to criticise her. Her humanity is focalised through her interior monologues. Plagued by regret and self-recrimination in the wake of Louise's death, 'revulsion of feeling', makes her 'faint with pity,

as she tries to realise the child's state of mind during the past months' (183). Although she rallies somewhat quickly and selfishly in order to protect herself from possible impunity, her mixed emotions convey a duality in her psychological makeup.

Clare's behaviour appears less reprehensible still when the Machiavelian tactics adopted by her patriarchal opponents, Elsbeth and Roger, to control Alwynne, are taken into consideration. Aunt Elsbeth, characteristic of women who function as complacent, repressive obstacles to change by conforming to society's ideal of womanhood in Victorian and Edwardian literature (Eldridge Miller 197), drives the marriage plot and succeeds in wresting Alwynne from Clare in order to match-make her with Lumsden. Recognising that 'Alwynne would be difficult' and, adamant that she needed 'a firm hand' (*Regiment* 334), Elsbeth manipulates her niece into resigning the career she loves and in which she excels, in order to marry a man who clearly fails to fire the girl's enthusiasm. Resisting Roger's entreaties to become '*a comfortable couple*', Alwynne implores, 'I don't want to get married. [. . .] How can I get married' [. . .] when I'm not in love with you?' (312–3), submitting to his proposal out of a lukewarm gratitude for the secure life and protection which he offers her. Aunt and suitor reduce her to an infantilised angel-woman. Under their yoke, 'she looked, in spite of her bigness, like an extremely small child, masquerading as a grown-up person' (308). A strong-minded, brilliant teacher and role-model for her pupils at the start of the narrative, by the end she has 'yielded like a tired child' (295) to her traditional domestic destiny. Alwynne regards Roger as a philistine: his books 'bored her!' and 'she didn't think much of his taste' (230). Clare, on the other hand, shares her literary preferences, and fashions for the two women an alternative modern domesticity based around female friendship, academic work and intellectual discussion. Brilliant, witty, modern, assertive and confident, she works hard in an occupation which sharpens her intellect and challenges the girls and young women in her charge, and ultimately she becomes a respected writer. Spatially mobile, she travels independently, and lives the kind of life to which women in the post-Victorian world were beginning to aspire and which resembled Dane's own. Regarding Roger's pre-feudal sensibilities an anathema, Clare represents the modern future for women which Dane fully valorises in her later works. Clare and Alwynne are soul-mates and 'lovers'. Falling completely and utterly in love after their first meeting, Alwynne 'walked home on air' (73) and following their first kiss, she declares 'I've never been so gloriously happy in my life' (151). Before the relationship is tragically doomed by Clare's jealousy and insecurity, they live in the harmony of her compelling alternative domestic set-up. Following her move to Compton Dene, Alwynne yearns to 'have Clare with her [. . .] to see and hear and touch and smell – to share the loveliness she was enjoying' and 'her thoughts flew to Italy, to their crowded month of beautiful sights together' (233). She receives Roger's

engagement ring with 'a glint of annoyance in her eye' (311) because it is exactly the ring that she wished she could bestow upon Clare to cement their bond. The sapphic lovers defend their relationship with conviction and alacrity. Alwynne protests to Roger 'can't you understand that I care for her – awfully. Why – I owe her everything. I was a silly, ignorant schoolgirl, and she took me, and taught me – pictures, books, everything. She made me understand [. . .] Clare woke me up [. . .] you don't know how good she's been to me. I owe her – all my mind –' (315). Clare likewise declares her love for Alwynne to Elsbeth, insisting that the girl:

doesn't want a husband . . . she wants me – and all I stand for. She wants to use her talents – and she shall – through me. She wants success – she shall have it – through me. She wants friendship – can't I give it? Affection? Haven't I given it? What more can she want? A home? I'm well-off. A brat to play with? Let her adopt one, and I'll house it. I'll give her everything she wants. What more can your man offer? [. . .] We suffice each other. Thank God, there are some women who can do without marriage – marriage – marriage!

(338)

Irrespective of the fact that *Regiment of Women* falls short of openly validating the lesbian bond, the compelling power of Alwynne and Clare's arguments for a type of domesticity which permits intellectual growth and passion cannot be ignored, and the fracturing of Alwynne's sexual identity can be regarded as something of a defeat.

Clare's lesbian world operates according to a psychological structure, theorised by Butler, in which the lesbian subject seeks re-establishment of the state of bliss originally experienced in the primal bond between mother and daughter. Butler hypothesises that cultural constructions of girlhood are dependent on the 'prohibition[of] the mother as an object of desire' and this 'barred object' is forthwith incorporated deep within the psyche, generating an incessant search for 'melancholic identification', expressed in lesbian infatuation or relationship (*Psychic* 136). Because this form of desire is culturally censured it is habitually repressed, creating a perpetual psychic condition of mourning. Homosexual attachment is thus 'unlivable passion and ungrievable loss' (135), and heterosexual feminine identity is 'purchased through a melancholic incorporation of the love that it disavows' (139). This is a compensatory process, which offers inadequate substitutions for the more psychically fulfilling homosexual relationship which has been renounced. Dane's mother died when she was a child and her three protagonists, Alwynne, Louise and Clare, are also melancholic orphans who seek to regain the lost maternal through the love of another woman. Alwynne's love for Clare is described as 'the secure and fearless affection of a daughter for a newly discovered and adorable young mother' (*Regiment* 66), and Clare and Louise's lesbian melancholia

similarly derives from the void left by the departed maternal presence. In her pupil, Clare ‘was constantly detecting traits and tastes [. . .] similar to her own [. . .] their histories were not dissimilar: she too [. . .] could look back on a lonely self-absorbed childhood’ (91). The ghost of Louise’s mother lurks in the attic of the Denny family home, an outward visible manifestation of the ‘lost object’ which ‘continues to haunt and inhabit the ego as one of its constitutive identifications’ (Butler *Psychic* 134) and Louise’s unsympathetic step mother bears more responsibility than Clare for Louise’s tragedy. When she clears the room of the dead woman’s remaining possessions, and gives it over for the cook to occupy, she effectively eradicates the spirit of the first Mrs Denny and ‘the affair of the attic, outwardly so trivial, shook the child’s nature to its foundation [. . .] her nerves, frayed and strained by weeks of overwork and excitement, snapped under the shock’ (*Regiment* 141). As she witnesses ‘the faint shadow of her mother wavering from visibility to nothingness’ (144), she is pushed over the edge. Striving to retrieve her mother by transferring her love to Clare, she confuses the two women – ‘there was Mother – and the Other – one was shape and one was shadow’ (145) – and unable to secure Clare’s love generates in her a ‘loneliness and longing [which] seared her as with irons’, and she responds with an anguished cry: ‘Mother? You’ve gone away, haven’t you?’ (154). Uncompensated maternal loss ends in suicide, the tragic counterpoint to Alwynne’s heterosexual compensation.

Lesbian suicide is also the plot outcome of *Challenge*, a dysphoric text in the lesbian tradition identified by Castle, with an erotic triangle whose resolution asserts the status quo and expels the lesbian-identified relationship. Ostensibly the tale of a love affair between a young Byronic aristocratic Englishman, Julian, and his cousin, Eve, it is actually a veiled representation of the author’s verboten sexual relationship with Trefussis, and an unashamed polemical validation of the supremacy of lesbian love fractured by societal pressures, which the text passionately and angrily derides. Like a lesbian lover, Julian represses his deep-seated feelings of distaste at what he believes is an incestuous desire for a woman who he has always regarded as a sister until his unconscious explodes with a sexual awakening which overrides the ‘brotherliness [. . .] still ingrained in him’, and he becomes shock-full of ‘thoughts and on the brink of an adventure far from brotherly’ (*Challenge* 206). Homosexual defiance is also symbolised by Julian’s rejection of the colonial ambitions of the paterfamilias, specifically his father’s interests in and exploitation of a feminine-identified vineyard-rich Mediterranean archipelago, Aphros. For Julian, Aphros comes to resonate with the sensuousness and naturalness of Eve: ‘for some reason which he did not analyse, he identified her with Aphros – the Aphros of romance and glamour to which he so obstinately clung’ (83), and when he finally makes love to her he conflates his two passions ‘“Eve!” he murmured exultantly, “Aphros!”’ (233). His

great uncle Henry attempts to persuade him to continue the colonial traditions. 'Bend the riches of that country to your own purpose' he advises, 'but don't identify yourself with it. Impose yourself. Make 'em adopt your methods. That's the strength of English colonisation' (38). Julian renounces English colonial masculinity, however, in favour of a pledge to support the island's revolutionary ambitions to attain independence from its (formerly Greek) independent parent state, Herakleion. Leading the revolution and isolating Aphros in the process allegorises Sackville-West's rejection of her husband to commit to a consummation of her relationship with Trefussis. Following years of chaste friendship, this 'burnt brilliantly and disastrously for [. . .] three years' when the couple got themselves into gender trouble, 'played truant' at Monte Carlo and then 'eloped' to France, before being pursued and repossessed by their husbands (Nicolson *Foreword* 7).

A beautiful, vulnerable and feminised space, Aphros carries multiple symbolic meanings for Julian, resonant of those which the Mediterranean held for Sackville-West. Like Clare and Alwynne, who are liberated from Englishness through holidaying in Italy, under the hot Mediterranean sun, the lovers enjoy freedom from patriarchal constraints and associated pressures to adopt a heterosexual identity. It is the place in the margins where they can evade normative culture and achieve sexual and spiritual fulfilment together. Here, where 'the village recognised them as lovers [. . .] he felt [. . .] the triumphant completeness of life; a fulfilment, beyond the possibility of that staid world that, somewhere, moved upon its confused, mercenary, mistaken, and restricted way' (*Challenge* 229). Where 'the indignities of hypocrisy were indeed remote' in this 'island of enchantment' he 'had fought for his dearest and most constituent beliefs', and

under the eyes of fellow-creatures, their presence no more obtrusive than the presence of the sea or the evening breeze, under their unquestioning eyes he claimed the just reward, the consummation, the right of youth, which in that pharisaical world would have been denied him.

(*ibid.*)

The idyll is short-lived however; his quest to liberate both Eve and Aphros is doomed because his simplistic conflation of the two means he overlooks Eve's resentment of his public role and the island politics that frequently rob her of his presence. Manipulating her mistrust of his innocent relationship with a female co-revolutionary, the Greek president persuades her to betray him to the Greek authorities, and her desire to see 'the Islands [. . .] at the bottom of the sea' (239), ironically prophesises her own fate. She, who is Aphros to Julian, becomes like the beleaguered archipelago, one who he cannot save, and she drowns herself when she

realises the ramifications of her betrayal. Subsequently Julian must live out his prophesy that after yearning 'to love Eve and Aphros] [. . .] when these two slipped from him he would return sobered to the path designated by the sign-posts and milestones of man' (245) just as Sackville-West did when she returned to her husband once her affair with Trefussis was over. By allegorising the thwarting of lesbian love through a tale of colonial subjugation, *Challenge* recalls the hounding of Clare and Alwynne, the social prejudice that demands Louise and Alwynne relinquish their love, and Alwynne's ultimate defection to heterosexuality.

Although the lesbian tragedy of Dane's protagonists can also be attributed to pressures generated by heterosexual ideology, it is also culturally determined by received educational philosophies which require Clare to maintain an overly professional distance from Louise, a factor which exacerbates the girl's mental illness. In this period, a cultural and educational code emerged which dictated that too much intimacy between teachers and pupils was unhealthy and that in order to safeguard children against the perceived emotional peril of becoming infatuated with their same-sex teachers, teacher-pupil relationships should become less affectionate and more formalised than had previously been the norm. According to Carol Dyhouse, 'women teachers undoubtedly found some difficulties in adjusting their behaviour from the forms appropriate in a small private school to those more fitting in the new, large-scale and more formally organised institutions' (Dyhouse 71-2) and while contemporary critical analysis focuses on the novel's apparent vilification of Clare's destructive lesbianism, Edwardian critics were more interested in what they saw as Dane's refreshing sensitivity to the kind of role confusion which Carol Dyhouse describes. For novelist S.P.B. Mais, for instance, the novel brought home the uncomfortable home truth that:

those who are keenest over their work, most anxious to produce noble citizens, may all unconsciously find themselves so far tampering with human souls as to drive them to ruin. The natural corollary of Miss Dane's book would seem to prove that no teacher can afford to try to win that human companionship or affection from the young, which is one of the most precious joys in life.

(74)

Clare's dalliances with her pupils are not intended to be harmful and she struggles, albeit unsuccessfully, to balance professionalism and emotional engagement, confusing Louise by sometimes inviting and sometimes repelling the girl's appeals for emotional closeness. The text sympathises with Clare's predicament. By referring to the close attachments which were often formed with 'the chance acquaintance, the neighbour of desk and bedroom; occasionally, very occasionally [. . .] for the girl's feverish admiration usually precludes sane acquaintanceship, a mistress of more

than average insight' (*Regiment* 49–50), the narrator suggests that it is often the heightened feelings of the girls rather than the machinations of teachers which instigate emotional mayhem. This perspective is reiterated in *The Women's Side*. Describing 'one of those charming young women [in school] with nothing at all of the vampire in her nature, but who, nevertheless, had a disastrous effect upon her pupils. She over-excited them' (65), Dane seems to suggest that even the most well-meaning of mistresses can create havoc in the context of a damaging single-school system which unwittingly incubates relationships between teachers and impressionable pupils.

Press reviewers endorsed this interpretation, writing of the novel's progressive contribution to Edwardian cultural debates about how educational reforms to end schools which 'still retained many of the evils of forty years ago' ('New Sydenham' *Scrapbook*), might lead to a 'reconstruction in education' ('Schools' *Scrapbook*). Although the nature of these 'evils' is not specified, self-destructive infatuation was generally regarded as the principal danger to the sexual health of the pupils in these institutions. Yet, the novel is also a tragedy of inadequate education in a broader sense and Louise is failed by the Victorian boarding-school system as a whole. One of Dane's chief narrative motivations is to promote women's autonomy by highlighting damaging educational practices and doctrines and proposing radical changes. The novel is committed to exposing the shortcomings of Wycombe Abbey and Dane changed her name during the writing of *Regiment of Women* specifically in case there were 'connections made between Utterbridge and Wycombe Abbey which might present legal difficulties' (Barrow 22). Her former school practised a regime in which teachers were 'extraordinarily watchful over the behaviour of their pupils [. . .] chaperones were insisted on [and] girls' relationships with the other sex – even brothers – were carefully monitored', where a 'careful supervision of girls' social behaviour [. . .] particularly in matters of dress, deportment and decorum' was maintained (Dyhouse 67–8). The school's draconian educational practices, rituals, and ethos are critiqued through textual representations of Utterbridge's punitive policies. Girls caught venturing out unaccompanied are confined to 'their bedrooms for three days, and nobody might speak to them for the rest of the term' (*Regiment* 220) and Alwynne complains to Roger that it is 'an awfully religious school. It scares some of the children' (259). Pupils are made to engage in 'prolonged and personal daily prayers', obligated to 'learn their daily Bible verse', and they carry about with them a 'little note-book [. . .] with its printed list of twenty-five possible crimes, and the dangling pencil wherewith, at tea-time, to mark herself innocent or guilty' (108). The narrator calls the regulations 'obsolete, irritating, or merely unintelligible' (*ibid.*) and argues for the replacement of this 'bygone system' with one more appropriate to 'the needs of the new century's hockey-playing generations' (*ibid.*).

Dane herself favoured modernisation, to 'change our unnatural way of educating children' (*Women's* 66) and the press recognised her 'very strong argument in favour of co-education' (*Regiment of Women's Christian World. Scrapbook*) and her ability to make 'us ashamed of the weight of unintelligent tradition and convention which kills the spirit; and raised us to enthusiasm for the fight for freedom and the individual' (*'Schools' Scrapbook*). She put her name to an appeal in *The Times* to raise funds for a new alternative mixed-sex school, Caldecott, a more egalitarian establishment with 'no domestics' and 'directors and [. . .] teachers sharing with the children the work of the house, the farm, and the garden', where 'in spite of the short "study" hours, the standard of intellectual attainment is high' ('Caldecott Community' 25). A co-educational school, Compton Dene is clearly modelled on Caldecott and generated much enthusiasm in the press on account of the fact it was 'difficult to distinguish between masters and pupils: [. . .] freedom and initiative and self-respect and co-operation were the ruling characteristics' (*'Schools' Scrapbook*). The antithesis of Utterbridge, defined by overcrowding, religious terrors, rigidified curricula and perpetual punishments, Compton-Dene encourages informal relationships between staff and pupils and the children enjoy a 'pleasant fearlessness of manner' (*Regiment* 218). Defying Utterbridge's cultivations of Victorian-style feminine conduct, involving warnings to the girls to 'remember they were ladies' (220), one of the Compton-Dene teachers, remarks, 'I don't think they want "ladies" here' (*ibid.*). The natural environment and physical freedom is integral to Dane's alternative domestic and educational vision: the wide sunny country spaces where Alwynne's health is restored and Compton-Dene's policy to embolden the girls to go for 'a tramp [. . .] by themselves – without a master or a mistress or anything' (220), are sharply contrasted with the claustrophobic regime of Utterbridge, where Louise's 'cramped body ache[d] for exercise' (132). The girls at Compton Dene 'have everything [. . .] with the boys', except needlework and housewifery (219), and Dane's modern integrationist spirit was compatible with the consciousness of her feminist peers, similarly drawn to a system where 'girls should study the same subjects as men' (Dyhouse 59). Vera Brittain, keenly opposed to 'our unnatural system of separate education for boys and girls' (qtd. in Berry and Bostridge 368), believed that single-sex education was 'the root cause of anti-feminism' and 'determined that her children would be taught on progressive, co-educational lines for as long as possible' (370). E.M. Delafeld's provincial lady takes a friend's forward-thinking advice to send her daughter to a co-educational school, indicating her receptiveness too to modern feminist ideas (*Provincial* 129).

Contemporary feminists ignore the progressive thrust of Dane's educational agenda, however, and in addition to its crime against lesbian integrity, *Regiment of Women* has been accused of additional conservative

anti-feminist positions. Wachman believes the novel demonstrates 'contempt for spinsters' (54) and Julien supports this, viewing the novel as implicit in the prevailing 'backlash against [new women], single women generally and women teachers in particular' (118), most specifically that type of 'woman increasingly feared early in [the twentieth] century: the spinster teacher' (Hennegan vi). Early critics were more inclined to recognise the novel's underlying sympathy for 'teachers whose life is one long painful grind, numbing all enthusiasm, all hope, all romance' ('Some New' *Tatler Scrapbook*). Dane openly expressed her admiration for spinster teachers, 'who give up their whole lives to serving other people's children' in *The Women's Side*, (63), calling them the 'most unselfish and hard-working body of [. . .] women in the world' (75). She particularly objected to their meagre salaries:

People will say – 'Oh, she has her holidays.' But what opportunities of change and travel and free social intercourse can a teacher with a couple of hundred a year and dependents have? Which, of course, brings us to the burning question of the payment, or rather, the wicked under-payment of assistant teachers.

(74)

Regiment of Women has been condemned for representing teachers 'as well off and not in need of equal pay' (Julien 119) yet when Utterbridge teacher, Henrietta Vigers, who 'had no friends outside the school' and 'left none within it' (*Regiment* 209), is dismissed from her position, and forced to quit the place where she 'had spent youth and prime', she has 'neither certificates nor recommendations behind her [and] out of a £50 salary she had scraped together £500' (*ibid.*), and the reader is invited to sympathise with the economic vulnerability of the Edwardian school mistress. The other schoolmistresses are equally poor and Clare's inheritance, which endows her with exceptional, not typical, economic means, does not make her economically invulnerable. Her relationship with Alwynne is defined by their shared work ethic and the reader may well feel uncomfortable about the contrast between this and Roger's leisured patriarchal position as head of the valuable Lumsden estate, which smooths his path to seduce Alwynne with promises of peace and endless relaxation away from her intellectual and professional life. Clare's is the tragedy of the pre-war single woman, the counterpart to Alwynne's triumph of marriage and financial security. Furthermore, by configuring several positive and agreeable spinster teachers, Dane challenges popular prejudice against single women fuelled by Stanley Hall's polemic, which held that 'the intellectual woman who did not find her supreme interest in marriage and motherhood was sick, sterile, likely to become a crabbed degenerate' (Dyhouse 124). Miss Hamilton, Utterbridge's feminist music mistress, known to have participated in 'the more law-abiding forms of suffrage

agitation' is attractive and well-balanced, 'a level-headed and convincing speaker, with a triumphant sense of humour' (*Regiment* 176) who avoids destructive entanglements, behaves kindly to the girls, and earns everybody's respect. Alicia, 'full of beans [. . .] travelled and [. . .] interesting' (217), enjoys an even fuller life in the emancipated context of Compton Dene. She exemplifies a life of positive possibilities for unmarried women under a more progressive school system. Furthermore, closing the novel with Alwynne's fulfilment as both wife and teacher at Compton Dene would have been unrealistic in the light of the marriage bar, about which Dane felt strongly and which she criticised in *The Women's Side*;³ by transforming her heroine from modern teacher to pre-war- feudal wife, reduced to the 'bazaar and a mother's meeting' (270), the injustices of the bar are highlighted.

Written in a period in which eugenicism was a strong patriarchal cultural imperative, *Regiment of Women* has been denounced as 'a narrow eugenicist best seller' (Wachman 54) which serves as 'a reflection of prevalent home front attitudes: the national obsession with marriages and war babies to replace the dead and dying young men; uneasiness about the new prominence of women in traditionally male jobs and nostalgia for a pre-war, idyllic, pastoral England' (55–56). Yet eugenicist rhetoric is conspicuously absent in the novel and no conviction expressed that education should take care not to interfere with girls' primary role to produce healthy offspring and strengthen the race. Academic work is not deemed detrimental to female health at Compton Dene. On the subject of Louise's suicide, Roger's sensible Aunt Jean is suspicious because, 'a girl doesn't go to pieces like that from a little extra work. Look at your Compton women at the end of a term. Bursting with energy still' (*Regiment* 266). Although Elsbeth and Roger cherish a wish for Alwynne to reproduce, Alwynne herself is largely silent on the matter. Moreover, although the novel was published in 1917, it was written in the early stages of the war, between 1914 and 1915, before the implication of the loss of young men to the future population had registered with the national consciousness. Furthermore, Dane is openly critical of eugenicist ideology in *The Women's Side*, condemning 'doctors and politicians and preachers [coming] down upon such lazy, such self-indulgent parents who thus limit the birth rate, [crying] "a declining birth- rate means a dying nation!"' (125–6). Her priority is not maternity and womanliness, but the happiness of girls, and she hopes for an education system to liberate them from restrictive Victorian-style domesticity and cultural mores, place them on equal terms with boys, mix the sexes, nurture female imaginations, assist growth and foster autonomous female identities. Her co-educational views, corresponding to those of her feminist peers, posed a challenge to theories of sexology promoted by Hall, especially his belief that mixed-sex schools were dangerously liable to feminise boys, provide girls with 'false goals in life', and by bringing girls into contact

with 'callow, unripe youths of their own age', cause them to 'lose their respect for the male sex' (qtd. in Dyhouse 124). Moreover, her nostalgia for a disappearing rural England is an aesthetic and environmental rather than an ideological and imperial sensibility; as in all her writings, outside space is configured as a nurturing place for women.

The stories of Alwynne and Louise demonstrate how the only possible exit routes for the vulnerable lesbian, whose trials are exacerbated by archaic boarding school customs, are death or heterosexual compensation. The novel reflects cultural temptations which may have been put to Dane, to metamorphose like Alwynne from lesbianism to a heterosexual identity and avoid the fate of the outcast. Dane desisted from this path in her own life and the alternative lesbian domestic setup she established for herself with Arnold and Bowen-Davies resembled Clare and Alwynne's shared world more than the traditional patriarchal home life which is Alwynne's portion. Her lack lustre portrayal of the male hero, Roger, noted by critics at the time of publication,⁴ suggests a definite lack of enthusiasm for heterosexual compensation; significantly the novel does not end by foregrounding the happy union of the lovers, but by throwing up cultural complications which echo the prevarications that disturb the outcome of *Jane Eyre*. Both texts conclude by dwelling, guiltily perhaps, on the anguished lonely character expelled from the love triangle and exiled from the plot: St John fated to Christian martyrdom and Clare, pitifully atoning, ultimately recognising that 'perhaps she had not been always good to Alwynne' (*Regiment* 341).

As the best-selling novel which established a tradition of lesbian writing, *Regiment of Women* very likely influenced the bisexual plotline in Rosamond Lehmann's *Dusty Answer*. Lehmann's novels also feature repressed homosexuality, an unconvincing 'conviction about heterosexual bliss' which 'lies [. . .] on the side of the author' and 'a sometimes curious effect of rebellious characters having to be pulled back into the heterosexual romance strand by the sheer doggedness of the storyline' (Rau 39). The novel opens as the heroine, Judith Earle, anticipates the imminent return to the house next door of four beautiful young non-sibling cousins, Martin, Roddy, Julian and Mariella Fyfe, with whom she had become enraptured when they stayed there as children before the First World War. She greets them with renewed excitement, especially Roddy, the chief object of her romantic speculations, who unbeknown to her is in a sexual relationship with his male friend, Tony Baring. Judith's identity, like Alwynne's, is shaped by liminal movements across connotative geographical locations. She crosses the threshold of her large family home complete with sloping garden down to the river Thames, which evokes the pre-war rural past, to places of emotional peril, first the Fyfes' house and then Girton College, Cambridge, where she leaves her infatuation with Roddy in abeyance in order to embark on her Tripos studies. The university's cultural life mirrors Utterbridge; in both

places educational possibilities are undermined by intellectual strain and claustrophobia, and both raise the prospect of an alternative domesticity grounded in lesbian love.

Homosexuality is treated more tolerantly and with greater relish than in *Regiment of Women*. Judith's erotic and aesthetic contemplation of fellow student, Jennifer Baird, with whom she becomes romantically attached, is unequivocally from the first a matter of great delight and pleasure, indicative of a sympathetic narrative perspective. The novel's broadmindedness is maybe attributable to the schwärmerian innocence of the relationship, its temporary status as a 'rehearsal for heterosexual romance' (Wallace *Sisters* 167). Significantly, Lehmann was quite as 'shocked' as Dane when it was suggested that her novel contained homosexual inferences and she insisted that she had intended to write 'the kind of innocuous emotional relationship she had herself with a friend at Girton' (Hastings 95). Like *Regiment of Women*, however, *Dusty Answer* is also infused with lesbian melancholy. Jennifer believes that her physical feelings for Judith are ultimately unspeakable and her love must be disavowed, and she is so inwardly disgraced by it that she heroically conceals her desire for fear of corrupting her innocent friend, distracting herself with a more open and so 'shameful' relationship with an established, already corrupted lesbian, Geraldine Manners. This makes her ill, and following an emotional breakdown, she unexpectedly removes herself from Cambridge rather than face her feelings. Rau points out that the lost and inadequately compensated maternal is the origin of poor psychic health in the novel for three lesbian-identified protagonists, Judith, Jennifer, and minor character and fellow Girton student, Mabel Fuller. Each seeks reparation for their inadequate experiences of mothering through liaisons with young women who they must ultimately renounce for the sake of public decency. The novel is deliberately circumspect, employing evasive grammatical devices: stops and dashes, to screen, in the sense of both showing and concealing, the lesbian relationships, so that they are nearly but never quite revealed. Bonnie Zimmerman observes this narrative strategy operating through a number of lesbian-identified writers, 'forced [. . .] to adopt coded and obscure language and internal censorship [. . .] to express hidden feelings and evade political enemies' (458). Giving an account of the 'wrestling matches' she has witnessed between Jennifer and Geraldine for instance, Mabel intimates her suspicions about the sexual nature of their relationship which she cannot speak, by cutting her utterances short to avoid uncomfortable revelations: 'I used to watch them from my window', she explains, 'I wonder they didn't. . . . I really wonder . . . any of the dons. . . . It looked so . . . throwing each other about like that . . . It's not the sort of thing you expect – quite, is it? I mean . . . ' (*Dusty* 157–8). Although generally more open minded in its treatment of homosexuality and lesbian loss than *Regiment of Women*, *Dusty Answer* is more conservative in its association of lesbianism with

masculinity and even physical ugliness and in Geraldine and the physically repellent Mabel, women to be carefully avoided, it paints 'portraits of a particular sort of homosexual woman' characteristic of representations of 'lesbians of a more ostentatious, mannish kind' in inter-war fiction (Rau 44). Lehmann's more overt lesbians disappear from the narrative, expelled because they 'threaten to derail the heroine's quest' (79). Clare, on the other hand, is neither macho or stereotyped and significantly remains the centre of interest in Dane's novel to the final page.

Unlike *Regiment of Women* however, *Dusty Answer* progressively refuses to provide the consolations of heterosexual romantic comedy and Judith is not rewarded with a traditional marriage outcome. Returning home after 'graduating', she lets Roddy seduce her but he afterwards rejects her and her romantic hopes are dashed. She attempts to escape this painful situation by taking up an invitation by Martin to his family estate, a country idyll like Compton Dene. Both places are the locus of pre-war patriarchal values and the place where the heroine is put in a tight hole by a proposal of marriage. Initially accepting Martin's offer, Judith quickly realises that she is too modern to reinvent herself as his traditional Christian wife, promptly ends the engagement and subsequently, holidaying in France with her mother, she encounters Julian, who offers her a 'fast' uncommitted sexual relationship. She is in the process of considering this second proposition when she reads in the newspaper that Martin has been killed in a sailing accident in The Isle of Wight. His death puts Julian's proposal out of the equation and she returns to England. Here, a letter from Jennifer awaits her, suggesting that they meet up in their favourite tea room in Cambridge. Judith makes the journey but Jennifer fails to arrive, leaving Judith finally alone, elegiac, reflective and resigned to a life without love. With no other marriage prospects forthcoming, the fairy-tale ending that Judith hopes for fails to materialise.

Although *Dusty Answer* is more infused with modernist pessimism than *Regiment of Women*, it is not an overtly feminist text. With the failure of Judith's romantic hopes, she meets the alternative possibilities that the modern world offers her with little enthusiasm. Writing as an outlet for her intellect and energies is given only brief consideration and prospects generated by her Cambridge education are regarded as poor substitutes for romantic fulfilment. The 'so much that might have been of enduring value [which] had offered itself' there and the 'many possible interests and opportunities [that] had been neglected' (*Dusty* 187), refer not to missed gateways to further educational and professional achievement but to the wasted chance of romantic relationships with other girls that she might have befriended and loved, had she not become so consumed by Jennifer and Roddy. As she confides to Julian, gaining her tripos 'hasn't given me much satisfaction. [. . .] I thought of nothing but work, because I didn't have anything else- particularly pleasant - to think about. One doesn't much value that sort of success' (204-5). *Dusty*

Answer and *Regiment of Women* share a lack of confidence in the educational opportunities and possibilities for sexual self-assurance available to women at the start of the twentieth century. Writing their first novels for publication, their authors' loyalty to traditional femininity betrays anxieties related to their controversial personal lives and the realisation of their professional ambitions. The expulsion of the lesbian relationships reflects, consciously or unconsciously, the tragedy of cultural forces impinging upon homosexual-identified women and upon inter-war fiction itself. The absence in their texts of any criticism of those cultural repressions which most likely compromised their own professional and sexual identity, can perhaps be attributed more to an unwillingness to issue challenges and risk censure than to a lack of awareness that their zeitgeist was restrictively homophobic. *Regiment of Women* is ultimately more politically engaged than *Dusty Answer*, however. The outcome of Dane's 'struggle between sentiment and truth' which she raises in *Tradition and Hugh Walpole* perhaps falls short of a 'victory for artistic truth' (209) but at variance with the overtly sentimental main plot is a more truthful subsidiary underlay. Beneath the romantic comedy, she exposes dark undercurrents of patriarchal power at work; in the injustices of the marriage bar, the underpayment and economic precariousness of women teachers, the infantilisation and coercion of Alwynne by smug proponents of sexual conformity, and Louise's (sexual) repression and suicide, all of which disturb the confidence of the traditional marriage closure. While both texts are caught between traditional and modern conceptions of female identity, Lehmann's novel disregards the possibilities of social change and is characterised by a spirit of resignation. Dane's novel on the other hand, looks for solutions, particularly in its arguments for revolutionising education to engender female autonomy.

Tracing her 'own experience [of the] cat-eat-cat [literary] world of backbiting and blatant careerism' (Schlueter and Schlueter 134), Dane's third novel, *Legend*, hailed by the *Times Literary Supplement* as 'a really original book' ('*Legend*' 649) replicates the incongruities of *Regiment of Women*, tentatively endorsing another unconvincing and unappealing marriage within a problematic lesbian narrative, exhibiting the same sexual elusiveness and employing similar modes of internal censorship. As an exploration of the modern crisis of role in the lives of middle-class women, it reveals a profound tension between normative domestic ideology and feminist rebellion, as the heroine is torn between feminist ideas, professional ambition, creative talent, lesbian sexuality and the pull of marriage and motherhood. From the perspective of character-narrator Jenny Summer, it tells the story of an event that took place some years previously during a regular weekly gathering of a group of artists and writers at the London home of her cousin, famous literary critic, Anita Serle, during which the news breaks of the death in childbirth, aged just twenty-six, of their most famous and gifted member, novelist Madala

Grey. Jenny relates how from the literal and figurative edge of the coterie, she listened to the ensuing discussion between the other guests, as they tried to piece Madala's life story together from their personal recollections, and solve the central dilemma of the unexpectedly poor quality of her final novel. Surmising that her work was adversely affected by the distractions of a romantic relationship, they speculate as to which man was responsible, her new husband, Carey, or an unidentified lover from among their group, probably Kent Rehan. With no strong evidence to implicate any one individual, they remain baffled by Madala's personal and professional life. Jenny expresses her view that Madala was faithful and fulfilled in her marriage, and the novel ends with her own romantic union with Rehan. Despite its traditional closure, the novel employs modern countercultural narrative strategies. These were acknowledged by Barrow, who wrote, 'Winifred had always been interested in form in her work. With *Legend* [...] she attempted to bring a new vitality to the form by tempting convention' (66) and Reginald Johnson, who notes the absence of strong 'story or plot' (187), in favour of a structuring mechanism reliant upon subjective fragments of 'memory or suggestion' (189). Indeed, with the main debated protagonist dead and voiceless, the narrative perspective is deliberately unstable, and the truth is dependent upon faintly remembered recollections which build towards a biography of Madala that is somewhat enigmatic and incomplete.

The jigsaw pieces point to a subversive subtext. The novel 'leans heavily upon the hint' (Johnson 195) and a series of hidden textual clues thrown up in the course of the evening problematise Jenny's normative assumptions about Madala's marriage, intimating an alternative lesbian interpretation of her life. Some of the guests recall Madala's uneasiness of manner following her engagement to Carey and her reluctance to discuss her new romance. 'She froze instantly', remembers one; 'she made no comment. She just changed the subject. But I felt as if I had been introduced to a new Madala' (*Legend* 116). Anita senses that 'there was something so furtive about it all: as if she were running away from something' (141). She recounts how, during a visit to Madala shortly after her marriage, their discussion about feminist literature ended abruptly when Madala became excessively anxious to get to the shops before they closed to buy coffee for Carey, who was unchivalrously 'sour' when he returned to find her not at home (58). The reason for these apparent cracks in the romance is implied through textual nuances, characteristic of the carefully veiled strategies of the lesbian narrative, which insinuate that unbeknown to Anita, she was the true object of Madala's secret desire. Remembering how she berated Madala for producing a disappointing last novel, Anita discloses that 'she'd been watching me all the time' (131) and afterwards she cried: 'never mind Anita. Forget it! Put it in the fire! You like me. What do the books matter? [...] If I'd never written anything, wouldn't you be just as fond of me?' (131-2). She testifies

to Madala's retaliation against her friend's refusal to 'separate' her from her work (132), how she rushed 'upon me like a whirlwind, shaking me by the shoulders, and crying out – "No, no, stop! You're to stop! It's me you like, not the books. I hate them. I hate all that. [. . .] *Don't!*"' (133). She recollects Madala making an odd exit from the tryst, turning back 'as if she wanted to tell me something and couldn't make up her mind' (136) and how, in what Castle refers to as the lesbian-narrative 'surge towards the body of another woman' (*Apparitional* 11), 'she kissed me' even though, 'we never did as a rule' (*Legend* 136). One of the guests inadvertently corroborates the nebulous lesbian undercurrent, recalling a discussion about the impending wedding which Madala abruptly broke off, and after some seconds of 'staring out of the window', enquired, 'if I'd not written *Eden Walls* would Anita have looked at me?' (156). The sub-text intimates that Madala follows *Eden Walls* with a populist travesty in deliberate retaliation against Anita's imperviousness to her affections and to put her beloved's feelings to the test, and when it becomes obvious that Anita is only interested in her talent and the use she can make of it, she realises that her lesbian love is unrequited and impossible and so becomes resigned to marry Carey. Inter-textual parallels between the relationships of Madala and Anita and Alwynne and Clare reinforce the implied lesbian subtext. Anita, like Clare, is older than the dominated young woman in her thrall, losing her leaves her guilty and somewhat bereft, and it is intimated that she too entertains lesbian feelings, although these are deeply repressed. Outwardly she denies any personal involvement with the dead writer, protesting 'fond of her! She knew my interests were intellectual. Fond of her!' (*Legend* 132–3), but her negation is suspiciously over-vehement and contradicted elsewhere in the text by her more honest self-enquiry 'who was the best friend she ever had [?] – even if I didn't make the parade of being fond of her that –' (67). Significantly, she checks herself before completing her utterance, in the manner of many of the novel's other witnesses to Madala's life who conceal and retreat from the implications of the unspeakable truth: that Madala's demonstrative behaviour towards Anita was the conduct of a lover, and that the women were mutually attracted. Jenny suspects that the relationship extended beyond the professional, recalling how Anita 'had said [. . .] that she only cared for Miss Grey as an artist, and I believe that she believed it. But I don't think – I shall never think it true' (111). The caginess of the coterie in general prefigures Lehman's strategy of concealment through Mabel's hesitations and reluctance to iterate the particulars of Jennifer and Geraldine's liaison in *Dusty Answer*; both novels are characteristic of the reticent tendency of the lesbian text to create 'shadows, spaces between words, what has been unspoken and barely imagined' (Zimmerman 458). Fifteen years after it was published, the existence and significance of these grammatical gaps and elisions was noted in an article in the press, whose praise of the novel's 'corrosive irony, and its

assured and luminous psychology', appears to suggest that it grasped the secret meaning therein. In order to insinuate the hidden lesbian subtext, it ironically uses the very technique employed by the novel. Writing 'it is in the things that are never said that we read the true story of Madala Grey', meanings are intimated in the narrative which the reviewer is not willing or perhaps able to expand on (*Melbourne Advocate* May 3 1934).

Anita's feelings towards Madala are not predominantly sexual; she more envies her creativity and covets her 'genius [. . .] the power to give life', more than her body (*Legend* 73). Consumed by 'jealousy insatiable' (187), she is the classic literary and fairy tale 'monster-woman, threatening to replace her angelic sister' (Gilbert and Gubar 28), a 'creature convulsed, writhing in flames' (*Legend* 62), forever 'seeking out fresh food' (187). With a 'queer movement of the head that always reminded [. . .] of a pouncing lizard' (22), she is fiend-like in her determination to metaphorically tear Madala's talent 'to pieces, flesh and blood, bone and ligament and muscle' (73). Madala's death ultimately gives life and impetus to Anita's career. Her biography, *The Life of Madala Grey*, paradoxically verifies and eclipses Madala's own work, effectively obliterating her by spotlighting her own biographical talents. According to one of its reviews, while the biography 'places Miss Serle among the Boswells' (1-2), it simultaneously diminishes Madala so that 'as we close its fascinating pages we find ourselves wondering whether our grandchildren will remember Miss Serle as the biographer of Madala Grey, or Madala Grey as the subject matter merely, of a chronicle that has become a classic' (2). The biography is equivalent to the powerful and dangerous potion which Snow White's jealous stepmother administers to fix the younger woman in an eternally beautiful state of stasis so that she can usurp her rightful high-status position. Anita eases Madala from her place in public imagination by omitting to include pictures of her in her book, claiming that none have survived. Her own portrait, on the other hand, is printed in all the newspaper reviews. Critics would be hard pressed to brand *Legend* as a reactionary anti-lesbian novel on account of its negative portrayal of Anita. Her sexuality is maddeningly indeterminate, the lesbian plot is too deeply hidden to operate dogmatically, and like Clare, Anita is more selfish friend than sexual predator. By correlating the monstrous and the selfish, rather than the monstrous and the lesbian, the novel works to strengthen the case against negative lesbian critical interpretations which have been made of *Regiment of Women*. In fact, while there is little evidence to suggest any hostility towards lesbianism, there is much to indicate sympathy; the more self-aware lesbian is not the villainous vampire-protagonist, Anita, but the idealised heroine, Madala, like Alwynne before her.

Ironically, the possibility of disclosing lesbian desire is raised in the narrative but it ultimately succumbs to cultural pressures to deny that such desire exists. This is achieved partly through what Castle terms an

'infusion of spectral metaphors' (*Apparitional* 34), a device which pervaded in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century lesbian texts to indicate lesbian loss and renunciation – to symbolise the way in which 'to love another woman is to lose one's solidarity in the world, to evanesce, and fade into the spectral' (32). Castle identifies a textual pattern in which 'the amor impossibilia' is raised and then 'obscured, disembodied, decarnalised', remaining in 'apparitional' traces, as the lesbian is either transformed into or haunted by 'a phantom or shadow' (34–36). She contends that ghosts variously signify the undesirability and impossibility of lesbianism. In the anti-lesbian text, she claims, ghosting motifs serve to exorcise the unwanted threat of female homosexuality by making it unreal and so impossible, while in more progressively pro-lesbian narratives, they suggest dominant culture's obliteration of lesbianism and the defiant lesbian's determined re-embodiment, her refusal to be erased (34). Both *Regiment of Women* and *Legend* see the spectral return of their lesbian protagonists. In *Regiment of Women*, Alwynne's mental collapse is induced by sightings of Louise's ghost, perhaps signifying the vaporisation of Clare and Alwynne's union and the expulsion of all three women from lesbian fulfilment. In *Legend*, Madala's phantom appears to Jenny as a key narrative event at the end of the evening, and ghosting symbolism is fully embedded within the narrative as a whole. Even in life, there is a sense in which Madala is never fully visible: one of the soiree-guests comments how in all of her photographs and portraits, 'you could never see her face, only a cheek curve or a shoulder line' (*Legend* 7), and Anita recollects how her protégé was prone to referring to herself using apparitional metaphors. On her return to her home village after a long absence, she declared: 'nobody remembers me. It's like being a ghost. Oh, I *feel* for ghosts' (34) and walking through the churchyard, where she is ironically eventually buried, she 'gave a kind of shuddering start', portending that 'someone must be walking over my grave' (46). Even her surname, Grey, indicates her nebulous and shadowy presence; indeed, the novel might appropriately have been titled *The Haunting of Madala Grey*. Without referring directly to *Regiment of Women* or *Legend*, Castle counts Dane among those writers who employ 'dysphoric examples of the spectral metaphor' for 'hostile and oppressive' uses (*Apparitional* 45). Certainly neither Louise nor Madala could be described as overtly defiant lesbians and on Madala's ethereal return after she has been subjected to the process which Castle identifies, 'translated into (empty) fictional space' (*ibid.*), she fails to affirm lesbianism as a cultural possibility, and functions rather to reinforce the hetero-normative script illuminating Jenny's destiny to marry Kent so that 'at last made clear' is 'my dream, my hope, my will and my desire [. . .] bodiless to me before that night' (*Legend* 181). Here, as in *Regiment of Women*, *Dusty Answer* and other texts which Castle identifies, a structural pattern is in operation, in which an 'ultimate representational blockage' (*Apparitional* 45) prevents a lesbian triumph and

reaffirms the normative heterosexual romance instead. Madala's spectral reappearance also supports Castle's theory of the empowering possibilities of the returned lesbian in *pro*-lesbian literature, however. The ghost work obviates Madala's annihilation, counters Anita's attempts at effacement and replacement, and re-animates her for the reader, preventing her and her veiled lesbian tale from being completely 'vaporised by the forces of heterosexual propriety' (7). As a plot device, it also focuses the narrative interest on female lineage, sisterhood and woman's special harmonious relationship with other women and the world of female spirits, central themes in Dane's writings. The text is framed by emblems of female continuity, opening at the end of Jenny's tale with her displaying the one surviving portrait of Madala in her marital 'den' to keep Madala's memory alive (*Legend* 2) and closing with her realisation of 'a sense in my heart of a trust laid upon me, of an inheritance' (194). She understands that she has been bequeathed Madala's story, her art, her identity and her specifically feminine literary vision.

Jenny and Anita function as Madala's doubles, signifying the polysemic nature of her conflicted identity. Jenny remarks, 'it was extraordinary' how *Eden Walls* 'knew how I felt about things' (*Legend* 12) and long before the two women meet, Madala uncannily prophesises Jenny's future role as her favoured double and Kent's wife, referring to 'a woman somewhere, rather like me [. . .] me without the writing, without the outlet. She'll pour it all into loving him' (156). Her words reveal her fractured nature; aspiring to be both wife and writer in a pre-feminist zeitgeist, her professional and personal selves are ultimately irreconcilable. While Jenny epitomises Madala's traditional womanly qualities, Anita is her modern, feminist-identified, professional twin, enthusiastic about her protégée's literary 'vein' of 'tracing a parallel between the development of the novel and the growth of the woman's movement' (57). *Eden Walls* is a feminist fable and Anita is impressed by how its traditional 'material', newly 'handled', had 'never been done quite so thoroughly, from the woman's point of view' (*Legend* 101), and 'the wrongs, not of one woman, but of all women, of all ages of women, that burn behind it' (111). Its 'startling originality and outspoken realism' (R. Johnson 188) are manifested in *Legend's* account of its plot, how it breaks away from the traditional narrative straightjacket of romantic fiction by charting the grim and fruitless quest of a young protagonist whose journey to independence entails facing the horrors of patriarchal society. Commencing with her heroine's squalid life in New York, it candidly charts her temporary fall into prostitution, as a consequence of which she is forthwith forever self-dispossessed of her innocent childhood in the English countryside which she tries in vain to recapture. Conceiving the survival of the single woman as a prosaic alternative to the marriage or death resolution, it is an unsentimental middlebrow realist novel devoid of conservatism which articulates Dane's vision for literature and acknowledges

the pressing need for wider female autonomy of the kind which Anita values and has achieved for herself. Madala's oppositional life choice which sees 'the writing, the work, all that made her what she was, tossed aside, for a whim, for a madness, for a man' (33) infuriates Anita because it is a betrayal of the message of *Eden Walls* and of Madala's personal, ultimately abandoned struggle for resilience and independence. The correlation between Madala's early life, and Anita's career path which so much resembles Dane's, works to complicate her role as the villainess of *Legend*. Like the heroine of Madala's novel, she too rejects the Victorian womanly norms of her girlhood and resists her mother's plans to 'have drudged me and dressed me and married me, I suppose, to three hundred a year and the city' (70). 'I'm a modern woman, and the modern woman is a pioneer', she declares. 'She's the Columbus of her own individuality. She must be. It's her career. It's her destiny' (119).

While Madala's creative courage earns her critical acclaim, *Eden Walls* is greeted with horror by the 'British public' who feel 'cheated' and 'shocked' and 'couldn't forgive [. . .] the absence of a love story' (*Legend* 101). Madala's writing choices reflect Dane's own anxieties relating to authorship, readership, censorship and ideology. Ironically, Dane creates a writer-heroine bold enough to risk censure by refusing to make alterations to *Eden Walls* to appease the censors, while her own *Legend* is much more circumscribed. *Eden Walls* reverberates with Madala's shocking life history, but when details of this are referenced in the main narrative of *Legend*, they are submerged deep in the sub-text, using the dash punctuation mark again, to intimate the unmentionable. Anita remarks, 'the things she told me that day. I knew she had been in America, but I never dreamed – She landed there [. . .] without a penny in her pocket, without a friend in the world' (35). In her final novel, *The Resting Place*, Madala retreats from the gritty feminist mode which characterises *Eden Walls*, succumbing to 'sentimentalism' (121), writing a 'pot-boiler' (132) of the type that Dane disdained. A traditional 'simple and early Victorian' style text (Johnson 188), it closes with the conventional line 'so they were married and had children and lived happily ever after' (*Legend* 120). The inauthenticity of its resolution betrays the rebellions of *Eden Walls*, in an echo of Dane's intra-textual retreats from challenging positions in favour of romantic conclusions in *Regiment of Women* and *Legend*. Among the explanations proposed by Anita's guests for Madala's narrative capitulation or what one calls her 'descent into milk and sugar' (126), it is suggested that the novel was deliberately intended as 'a skit' (120) which 'parodies the slush and sugar school' (128) and simultaneously gives 'the jam-pot public what they wanted' (120). This theory seems to be corroborated by Madala when she states her intention to be 'a pioneer in my own way', to 'shock the lot of you' (119) and there is an uncanny parallel between what the salon guests regard as an unconvincingly wooden representation of the husband-figure in *The Resting Place* and the depiction

of Roger Lumsdale in *Regiment of Women*. While parody is a different strategy of rebellion than Dane's method of incorporating resisting subtexts, both literary approaches are ironic. *Legend* undermines normative gender ideology in another way: Madala and her art are literally destroyed, not by her female rival but by husband and marriage, and her death in childbirth acts as an implicit warning of the price to pay for abnegating one's career in order to foster a traditional domestic and womanly identity. The title of Madala's novel underscores this message: the 'resting place' of marriage leads to her final resting place of death and heterosexual compensation is even less convincing here, perhaps, than in *Regiment of Women*. The conservative pre-war Victorian/Edwardian cultural hegemony means that Madala is more vulnerable than her fictional descendants to literal and creative obliteration.

Hamer notes that 'lesbians may have written lesbian love stories but public distaste for lesbianism and public nervousness insured that they were not published' (85) and like *Regiment of Women*, *Legend* is suffused with a homosexual guilt and confusion characteristic of this early stage of modern womanhood, confined by traditional cultural beliefs which would weaken after the war and the onset of a modern world. Yet for all its nervousness, it succeeds in refuting traditional narrative dichotomies which divide female characters into uncontained witches and housebound angels, transforming the traditional-morality structure for a tentatively modern readership by condemning careerism which is untempered by humanity while defending the professionalisation of women in general. Just as Alwynne's marriage to Lumsdale is undermined by the textual memory of her relationship with Clare and by Louise's suicide, Jenny's normative story of an awakening to reciprocated heterosexual love is undercut by Madala's tragedy of unfulfilled lesbian and professional desire, and both texts pave the way for Radclyffe's Hall's notorious overtly lesbian novel, *The Well of Loneliness*.

Dane's narratives of lesbian love, albeit veiled, are markedly more open than *Challenge*, which despite its consciousness of masculine hegemonic oppression is even less willing to risk homophobic condemnation. Sackville-West actively sought to avoid gender trouble, cancelling the publication of the novel in the U.S. at the last minute because her family and friends feared a scandal. She was also worried it would cause damage to the reputation of Trefussis, who incidentally took the cancellation as an act of disloyalty to the authenticity of the two women's love affair. By masquerading as the story of a heterosexual romance, it is not an 'out' text and Sackville-West's decision to make her self-representative character male traps her into differentiating between her lovers according to their biology, which generates some less than feminist generalisations about the differences between men and women. The narrative privileges the masculine spirit, with which she identified, as capable of growth, depth and integrity, and denigrates what it considers the oppositional shallow immutable

selfishness of woman, evidenced in Eve's behaviour. Eve's name, with its significations of weak temptress, seducer, betrayer, is particularly apt. During an argument between the lovers about the death of a mutual friend, Julian declares 'you don't know the meaning of pain. You inflict pain for your own amusement' and calls her 'a thing of leisure [a] toy!' whose 'deepest emotion' is 'jealousy', who, because she is a woman, 'can change [...] personality twenty times a day [and] can't understand a man's slow, coherent progression; he, always the same person, scarred with the wounds of the past' (170). Julian's will to liberate Eve/Aphros is paradoxically also a masculine will to possess and this impulse goes uncontested in the text. As he surveys the islands that 'lay there as innocent and fragile as a lovely woman asleep', he understands why his grandfather, erstwhile revolutionary president of the island, was driven to take control of 'such disarming loveliness' (84). He equates Eve with the conquered geographical domain, which 'awaited him [...] bore with it a strange proprietary sense in which Eve was included' (101) and he is confident that 'she could be, if he chose, his own possession' and he 'might violate the sanctuary and tear the veils from the wealth of treasure hitherto denied to all; might exact for himself the first secrets of unplundered passion' (211). Coveting her as his father coveted Aphros, he requires her 'weakness to fling his strength into relief; submission to entice his tyranny', that she 'be nothing less than the whole grace and rarity of life for his pleasure' (230). Her failure to submit to him and gain the protection which this would have conferred upon her is presented as the novel's principal tragedy. Later mid-century lesbian texts, especially those in the school-novel tradition, were able to push lesbian narratives in more gender-progressive ways. By 1933 Ivy Compton Burnett could conclude her girls' school novel, *More Women Than Men*, with the happy consummation of a same-sex relationship between two middle-aged women, Josephine Napier, the school head and Maria Rosetti, teacher of modern languages. Desiring a professional partnership in the school and personal relationship with Josephine from the beginning of the narrative, Maria achieves her ambition in more ways than one when as it closes, Josephine 'caught the eyes of her companion', Maria's long-concealed passion for her employer becomes reciprocated, 'starting forward', she 'fell into her arms, and the two women stood locked in their first embrace' (199). Dorothy Strachey's autobiographical post-war elegiac narrative *Olivia* (1949) also tentatively raises its head above the parapet of lesbian self-concealment by fully authenticating the doomed reciprocated love between sixteen-year-old Olivia and her boarding-school teacher, Mademoiselle Julie.

Romantic Yearning in Heterosexual Contexts

Almost fifty years before Judith Butler developed her queer theory of heterosexual compensation, Simone de Beauvoir devised her hypothesis

that woman's identity is traditionally predicated on a romantic pathology, a false emotional consciousness arising from the workings of culture on her selfhood, generating unconscious dramas of sexual compensation in her psychic life. Analogous to Butler's paradigm of patriarchal sexuality inadequately compensating for the lost maternal, de Beauvoir too identifies the female orphan yearning for a love that 'will give her back her mother' and with it 'her childhood [. . .] a roof over her head, walls that prevent her from feeling abandonment in the wide world' (655), yet it differs substantially with regard to its contention that women's default identity is heterosexual, that she searches for her mother 'as well as her father' (ibid.). Thus Butler's thesis usefully illuminates the lesbian elements of *Dusty Answer*, *Regiment of Women*, *Legend* and *Challenge* and de Beauvoir's is pertinent to gendered critical readings of the heterosexual narrative in *Dusty Answer* and also in *First the Blade*. In this novel, Laura Valentine is subject to the cultural process which, de Beauvoir explains, woman's prevention from 'self-realisation in acts' (653) which causes her to seek authenticity and erase her anxieties about her feminine redundancy or 'otherness' through an attachment to a father-substitute, who she regards as oppositionally whole and absolute. Obsessed with her self-absorbed and indolent neighbour, Justin Cloud, Laura is de Beauvoir's prototypical woman, clinging to a man, 'habituated to seeing in him a superb being whom she cannot possibly equal' (653) and hoping 'that he will give her at once possession of herself and the universe he represents' (656). In her adoration she complies with delimiting Edwardian normative strictures that demand women create comfortable domestic arrangements 'in which [only] men could live and work' (Dyhouse 26), trying to perfect 'the trick of keeping [Justin] amused' (*First* 55) and striving 'to exist demurely as no more than a domestic pet, with a trick of loosening his tongue for him and the still more stimulating habit of listening in intelligent admiration while it wagged' (68). The novel's pattern of female subordination and love-sick despair anticipates *Dusty Answer*. Also a prototype of de Beauvoir's misguided women who revere men as 'supreme beings' or the 'sovereign subject' (653), Judith's romantic pathology defines her unreciprocated attachment to Roddy. She is twice thwarted and experiences double gender trouble: the cultural and psychological prohibition of her lesbian desire and the unhealthy nature of her heterosexual yearning for Roddy.

First the Blade is infused with more spirit of feminist rebellion than *Challenge*, *Dusty Answer*, *Legend* and *Regiment of Women* however, as Laura is less compromising than her fictional predecessors. Reflecting Dane's emerging interest in the possibilities afforded by a modernising culture for women to combine candour and benevolence with creativity, ambition and independence, *First the Blade* is the first of her novels to openly critique traditional femininity as dominant ideology and to reject dependence on the questionable male suitor as a solution, which was so problematic in

Regiment of Women. Instead, it orchestrates the triumph of the single woman, marking Dane's transition to equality feminist writing, characterised by the Edwardian 'rebellious woman' heroine, determined to 'fight against the binary oppositions that reinforce gender polarisation and limit women's choices' (Eldridge Miller 4) in texts with literary 'patterns of resistance' (Joannou, Ladies 2) which are concerned with 'empowering [them] to break free from the prison house of oppressive relationships' (128). This form of writing subverted the traditional patriarchal coming-of-age story form, in which a woman is effectively educated 'to decrease her sphere of action or to "grow down" [. . .] give up those aspects of her independence that separate her from patriarchal society, and [. . .] find ways to reconcile her view of herself with others' expectations of her' (Ellis 18), and manifests as '*bildungsromane*' (Eldridge Miller 116), a form which focuses on a successful 'struggle to balance a heroine's internal motivation with what others expect of her' (Ellis 35–36). This development process is completely out of the question for the heroines of *Regiment of Women* and *Legend*; as lesbians, their fulfilment is outlawed by homophobic culture, but Laura's heterosexuality means the conventions of the feminist version of the classic rites of passage text lend themselves a little more comfortably to the establishment of her relatively autonomous identity. In this semi-autobiographical narrative, like her author she trains as a painter, her relationship with Justin 'closely echoes that between Winifred and Arnold', Elsie Arnold's brother, to whom Dane was at one time engaged (Barrow 24), and she breaks free from the expectations of her family and Justin's mother, Mrs Cloud, that she will become Justin's wife, when it becomes clear to her that they he will never make her happy.

Domestic novels are characteristically centred on 'the daily life of a contained community' (Briganti and Mezei 17), and sequestered within her home village of Brackenhurst at the start of the novel, Laura is habitually loyal to her friends and relatives who mould her into traditional roles and subject her to the 'crushing burden' (Beauman 58) of a 'kindly tyranny of family interest' (Robertson qtd. in Beauman 58). She is regularly either occupied in the family home with 'virtue and housewifery [. . .] turning out the dining-room with Maud Ann, [. . .] entertaining the Vicarage [. . .] with tea and small-talk; and playing double-dummy, grimly, with Gran'papa all the long light beckoning evening' (*First* 134) or on visits to the Clouds who live nearby, where she struggles miserably to meet the 'standards of conduct', set down in Mrs Cloud's 'Bible and her good little books [. . .] set up like ninepins' in a series of maxims such as '*a continual dropping on a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike*' (110). She longs to escape to the great outdoors and this impetus combined with her romantic glorification of Justin means that 'as long as she had her Saturdays with Justin she could bear' the domestic claustrophobia of the rest of the week (134). Her beloved's cruel appropriation of nature

prevents her from attaining rural peace, however. His friend, Oliver, notes his will 'to classify, to lock doors, to enclose' (112), and his pulling to pieces the flora and fauna he collects in the fields surrounding the village is a rational failure of imagination, the dichotomy of Laura's intuitive conserving and broad-minded femininity, 'ever querying, opening [. . .] up avenues' (ibid.). The joy of crossing the threshold of the limiting domestic environment into sacred rural space is thwarted for Judith too by a similar masculine proprietorship of the landscape. She is tempted to become Martin's wife precisely because of the freedom of the Fyfe estate which she falsely assumes will come with the role. Hoping 'perhaps the land might compensate, drug the mind and give it slow contented musings. Perhaps you could escape from Martin and feel alone with it' (*Dusty* 243), she comes to realise that the land 'with its medium tints and mild companionable expression [. . .] was he himself. You could never get away from Martin here (ibid.). Her expectations that his traditional values will rescue her from the pain of living in the complicated modern world are dashed by his ubiquitous and destructive presence in the landscape she craves. Like Laura and also *Lolly Willowes*, whose immersion in the natural world is compromised by Titus's 'possessive and masculine love' of the countryside 'as though it were a body' (*Townsend Warner* 160), Judith is emotionally devastated by the careless operation of male power. Forced to watch first Roddy and then Martin killing wild rabbits, 'she sat there, tearing up turf with shaking cold wet hands, face averted, eyes staring, mouth open and out of shape, impossible to control. 'Oh dear! Oh dear! Oh dear!' The repetition was a sort of whine or mew' (235) and later that night, she wakes from a nightmare, crying 'The Rabbit! . . . the rabbit! [. . .] Everything shrieked, – and she started awake, sweating, in horror and desolation' (*Dusty* 240).

In *Dusty Answer* men are configured as disappointing creatures, *Regiment of Women* can only half-heartedly validate Roger and Justin is also a dull, inferior construction. As in *Legend* the narrative events are situated in the recent past and framed by the distanced reflections of contemporary character-commentators, in this case, two female fictional co-authors with a friendship suggestive of Dane and Arnold's, who engage in a feminist critique of Justin and Laura's self-encumbering normative gender performances, demolish Justin's credibility and mock inadequate pre-war masculinities. One begins by remarking, 'Adam was first formed, then Eve. [. . .] Yet Eve, bless her ingenious, enterprising heart, is always so much more interesting than Adam' (*First* 7), continuing later on in the same vein by declaring, 'man generalizes, woman defines' (97) and reducing Justin's credibility on account of his environmental aggression. 'Interest him in a subject,' she suggests:

and he had no peace until he had pursued that subject, netted it, stunned it with books of reference, stripped it of its robe of mystery,

taken it to pieces, turned it inside out. And finally, when it was quite dead and done for, and its poor soul fled, he would hang up the dry bones in triumph.

(69–70)

Also declaring that Justin ‘positively must not have a sense of humour or he would never collect birds’ eggs’ (3), and mocking his ‘magpie instinct that as pleasantly infantizes the ponderous male as a pink paper cap from a cracker the bald head of an uncle at a Christmas dinner’ (69), the co-collaborators’ verbal deprecations of men are mirrored in *Man Proud Man* fourteen years later. Helen Simpson vents her irritation with the popular masculine inter-war passion for collecting in her chapter ‘Man the Magpie’, asserting ‘if there is one masculine activity more than another which disconcerts and enrages women, it is this trick of collecting’ (141), and ‘collectors are always men and frequently nuisances’ (173). Susan Ertz, in her chapter, contends that women are ‘made happiest by a heightening of consciousness, an increased awareness of self’ (80) while men must be ‘taken out of themselves by the most frivolous pursuits’ as ‘the goal and ambition of every pleasure-seeking male [is] to escape, to flee from himself and from reality’ (79–80). Both associate hobbies in general with an essential male deficiency.

First the Blade interrogates the negative operation of cultural pressures and masculinity on female creativity with more conviction than *Legend*, dramatising Laura’s efforts to negotiate the public and private domain. While Justin aborts birds, Laura paints them, and gratifying her lover by supporting a pastime which is antithetical to her passion for life, creativity and beauty becomes unbearable. The strain is temporarily abated when an opportunity arises for her to travel to Europe to study art, in the manner of a number of young and unmarried upper middle-class women at the time, including Woolf’s Lily Briscoe and Dane herself; Briscoe and Dane stay in Dresden, Laura at a school of painting in Paris. Journeying into this wider and more public world where her creative talents are recognised opens up transcendent possibilities, but these are quickly closed down because she is unable to overcome her misguided consciousness that the main purpose of her studies is to make her ‘as good and as great and as wise as’ Justin (*First* 78). Her romantic enslavement impedes her path to economic independence and creative fulfilment and she is easily persuaded to abandon her painting to meet up with him in Italy, principally because he wants her as a companion for his mother there. Although she grieves for her abandoned vocation, and from the train the Lucerne vistas which she longs to paint are ‘the torment of her [. . .] all-absorbing eyes and her itching finger-tips’ (85), with the prospect of reunion with Justin her romantic pathology triumphs, ‘the words that were rung in her ears, “career,” “success,” “ambition,” “future,” could not convey their meaning, died away again as words, mere words’ (83) and when she sees

him again, 'beauty was forgotten, was a nothing, a phrase, a dead leaf. The high hills were cardboard, the sky a back-cloth and no more' (86). Compared with *Dusty Answer*, wherein French cities denote modern culture at its most shallow, depthless, sexualised and brittle and Judith feels compelled there to perform a careless and unsatisfactory modern femininity, in *First the Blade* the artistic milieu of Paris signifies the growth proffered to Laura which she foolishly discards. One of the narrator-collaborators describes her as 'a painter who had just sold her birthright for [. . .] Justin' (85), directing the reader to deconstruct her romantic fantasy through polemical narrative interjections such as, Laura's 'books were an education, and an education is more useful than pretty elbows' (19). In Italy she is reduced from painter to sitter for Oliver, who is an amateur artistic, and redefined as the object of his gaze, imprisoned in his painting. She is further demeaned by Justin's chauvinism and philistinism; he ranks Oliver's mediocre artwork above hers and is irritated by her new European sophistication. She placates him by reverting to her old self, hoping that 'if she only kept quiet and wore her old clothes' (96) their relationship might improve, and becoming conscious that her 'opinions, negligible as he felt them to be, had always [. . .] had [. . .] a singular and uneasy effect upon him, as of undigested apples' (111), she again becomes 'quiet and sweet' (96), sufficiently submissive that 'if she had been his favourite armchair, at arm's length from his bookshelves and the back to the light, she could not have suited him better' (111). The reward for her acquiescence is his proposal of marriage, made principally in order that Mrs Cloud will continue to have company when he is away on egg-collecting trips, definitely not 'a woman's show' (148). She accepts with a womanly pledge, 'I'll be so good to you. [. . .] I'll never get in your way. I'll learn cooking. I'll never read books till after tea. I'll do everything – ' (146). Re-confined to domesticity, she forthwith prepares to last out his absences by dreaming of marriage and administering to the needs of his mother.

She discovers the rebellious spirit which eluded her in Paris, however, aided by Justin's widowed sister-in-law, Coral, a refreshingly sympathetic working-class character and feminist role model, the first in a series of female protagonists in Dane's texts for whom the theatre provides the means to movement and independence. Although the narrative conventionally privileges the heroine's middle-class imagination, Coral's proletarian stoicism, good cheer, sexual intelligence and survivalism provide an energising contrast to Laura's delicacy and sensitivity. A genuine friendship develops between the two women, revealing to Laura the limitations of middle-class social prejudices and the patriarchal code. In opposition to her naive class-based defence of John Cloud, Justin's deceased brother – 'but he was a gentleman!' – Coral offers a deconstructive counter-judgement: 'a gentleman's just a man when he's drunk [. . .] same as most other times – swears the same and smells the same' (*First* 179). She

knocks Justin off the pedestal too, challenging Laura's low self-opinion: 'Not good enough? What utter rot!' she retorts, 'as if a woman weren't always too good for a man. It's Justin who's lucky, I should say!' (174). Defiantly proud that she would not 'live on a man even if he were my husband', that 'I own myself, you know. I pay my way' (176), she demonstrates that it is possible to ignore the rules of womanly conduct and thrive, and endows Laura with a sense of self-worth. Justin is imaginatively ill equipped to make empathetic connections. Cloudy by name and in nature, he is self-centredly imperviousness to the needs and feelings of others as Laura learns when she witnesses the crushing effects of his middle-class masculine power on Coral's working-class livelihood. His over-absorption in a newly-arrived egg cabinet means he reneges on a promise made to her to recommend his sister-in-law to one of his theatre-manager friends for a position with his acting troupe. His oversight obliges Coral to get work with a company touring in Africa instead, forcing her to leave behind her young son. Adding insult to injury, Justin dismisses Carol's right to independence on account of her sex as well as her class, and his self-satisfied comment, having 'offered her a home and income [s] he need never see a theatre again' (201) offends Laura's growing feminist and egalitarian sensibilities. In retaliation, she forces him to see a parallel between Coral's thwarted ambitions and her own domestic entrapment. 'Oh Sunflower', she cries, 'I've such a nice cellar for you! If you'll come and live in it, you never need see the sun!' (ibid.). In *Man Proud Man*, Simpson calls 'the conscience of the acquisitive man [. . .] numb and blind' (158) and Delafield declaims that 'men are not imaginative. [. . .] If men possessed imagination [. . .] they would be forced to contemplate all kinds of things – injustices, inequalities' (48); Justin is a class snob and a fictional example of the kind of man that these writers critique. Whereas Laura is unphased by Coral's vernacular and willing to ignore social etiquette and demonstrate affection to her social inferior when she departs for Africa because 'she knew that Coral would expect it; she was of the class that could be genuinely moved in public' (204), Coral's accent made Justin 'shudder' (*First* 172) and ashamed that he 'would shiver at the idea of Coral's farewells' because they 'might [. . .] culminate in an embrace', Laura heartily 'wished he would be vulgar and human and uncritical for once' (204). The Cloud family's social prejudices cloud their understanding. Mrs Cloud's comment, that Laura 'was doing Coral good. Hadn't Justin noticed how much quieter poor dear Coral had grown in manner', is playfully undermined by the narrator's interjection: 'neither Mrs Cloud nor Justin noticed how much good Coral was doing Laura' (177). Ironically, it is Coral who wields the influence, threatening their control over Laura, rousing her from her self-suppressions by which, 'she had learned so rigidly to repress herself in speech and still more in manner' (202), and enlightening her to the bitter truth that she just does not 'count' for much in Justin's eyes (182).

Coral empowers Laura to re-evaluate her relationship with Justin and this forces an epiphany which impels her to follow her friend's parting advice, to 'smash up his old eggs!' so that 'you'll have some peace!' (*First* 206), forcing an irresolvable rift with Justin. This conscious liminal act connects the novel to early twentieth-century women's texts noted by Teresa Reus Gómez and Terry Gifford in whose pages female protagonists bravely cross time and space in order 'to separate from a prior state of security' (6). The nature of Laura's rebellion can also be understood psychoanalytically. Her psyche becomes split between 'the Joseph-coats of manner and custom, of tolerance and caution and indifference, in which we clothe and conceal ourselves', or the ego, and 'our unchanging, unchangeable selves, old as age, young as youth, sexless, amoral, unconvinced by human logic, unbound by human laws', the id (*First* 231). The 'original self' which 'wakes up, with a rending of garments [. . .] in emergency, in crisis', or psychological watershed, and 'takes charge', is described subsiding 'when the occasion is over' whereupon it is 'sunk to sleep again' when 'our bewildered, protesting surface selves [. . .] have to take the consequences' (231). With the surfacing of Laura's submerged semiotic, stored imaginative energy is released, the feminine source of both destruction and creativity, and she is 'for the first time in her life, in that mood which many women and all artists know, when the accumulated, unconscious thinking of many weeks, of many years sometimes, surges up and overflows the surface consciousness' (207). Regressing to what Jacques Lacan would later call the mirror stage, she faces her confrontational looking-glass reflection, her rebellious pre-symbolic self, the same mad, mutinous double that Gilbert and Gubar identified as a pervasive figure in women's nineteenth-century writing in *The Madwoman in the Attic*. As it 'stared at her with that air of critical comprehension that looking-glass faces have', a dialogue between her two selves emerges:

'thoughts, underneath its imitative obedience, shone in its eyes with such an odd suggestion of menace that she cried out to it at last, aloud – 'What is it? Oh what is it? I'm afraid –'

Its lips, moving quickly, answered even while she spoke –

'– of yourself! Actually afraid of yourself. You're afraid to be yourself, aren't you? Justin mightn't like it. [. . .] It's such a pleasure to oil the wheels – to be always exactly what he wants, where he wants, and when he wants. It's the delightfulest slavery.'

(222)

Like Catherine Earnshaw, she is 'trapped in the distorting mirror of patriarchy' (Gilbert and Gubar 282), but she is more fortunate than her famous predecessor, for whom the 'journey into death is the only way out' (*ibid.*); reflected back to her is her original and recoverable empowered self, and

through a process of illness and recovery she comes to eschew the tragic destiny of the prototypical mad Victorian heroine.

She is no longer de Beauvoir's generic woman, one who, 'revolts against herself in a spirit of "self-disgust [and a] hatred of herself, which drives her to self-punishment" when "she fails to engross" her male beloved' (de Beauvoir 661–2). Against the normative pattern of passivity in woman, the condition in which 'everything incites her to follow the easy slopes; instead of being invited to fight her own way up' and 'she is told that she has only to let herself slide and she will attain paradises of enchantment' (ibid.), Laura's psychic epiphany sets her on a path to renounce the easy comforts of submission and stagnation, to hurt the patriarch and prevent any further damage to herself. de Beauvoir calls the outcome of feminine 'exigent devotion' a 'tyranny [. . .] insatiable' (666–7) and Dane's narrator makes the same point, identifying romantic pathology with the 'tyrannous motherliness that is in every woman' (*First* 224) and duly urging Laura to reject the dubious gains won from encouraging and condoning Justin's 'harmless, useless enterprises', the temptation to 'lead happy, well-fed lives [and] die at last, placidly, and be buried' (ibid.). Coming to an understanding that marriage 'would be the end of them; because the spirit within them would have been stifled long ago' (ibid.), she circumvents the cultural role made famous by Mrs Ramsay, the supportive Victorian womanly wife in *To the Lighthouse*, whose nourishment of her husband's unchecked egotism serves to safeguard patriarchal-imperial power structures. Dane is of Woolf's conviction, that it is imperative for Victorian-born women like Laura, 'so un-modern in her ways and thoughts' (2) to resist cultural pressures to become what Woolf terms 'the angel in the house' (Professions 235), in order for feminist progress to be made. With the emergence of Laura's nascent feminist state comes a determination to cease disguising her antipathy towards 'cruelty to parent birds', to gauge 'the comparative value of a dead shell and a live songster' (*First* 134). Synonymous with the shot rabbit which symbolises Judith's emotional destruction by Roddy, annihilated bird embryos signify Justin's devastating effect on Laura's selfhood. In psychic crisis, in 'that naked hour [when] things – murders – masterpieces – happen' (207), she dramatises Simpson's point: that, in retaliation against men's maddening collecting-habits, 'women can plan, and upon provocation commit, quite excellent murders' (Simpson 174). Her act of rebellion is paradoxically creative and deadly. She kills the phantom woman to avoid the fate of embryonic paralysis suffered by the bird foetuses: 'having your insides blown out before you'd ever been born' (*First* 73). Yet because 'it is agonising for a woman to assume responsibility for her life' (de Beauvoir 655), her break for independence is also ironically an abortive act. By effecting her complete estrangement from Justin, she loses the life-giving role which the normative route from marriage to motherhood might have conferred upon her, and as for Judith,

the conflict between womanliness and autonomy initiates a temporary nervous collapse.

At the start of Laura's story, one of the collaborators prepares the reader not to expect traditional modes of closure, remarking, 'we should be justified in leaving them, at the end, wooed and wedded [. . .] in a very rainbow of happiness. And yet – I doubt' (*First* 3). Assumptions that Justin will realise the depth of his love for Laura and abandon his egg collection in order to nurse her back to health and into marriage are purposefully disappointed; the novel is more concerned to trace Laura's post-crisis development towards a full femaleness outside of marriage, 'into that heritage of knowledge, and instinct that is more than knowledge' (3). Her epiphany is ultimately a positive and necessary prelude to her development into an independent woman, as signalled by the novel's subtitle 'A Comedy of Growth' and its prefacing quotations: "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear" – St. Mark iv.28' and 'each man to himself and each woman to herself, is/the word of the past and present, and the true word of immortality' (Whitman). Justin goes to war near the end of the novel, and coming back on leave at the end with his anger towards Laura a little abated, there is evidence that his sense of generosity and tolerance have slightly improved. Yet he remains in a predominant condition of arrested development, 'never the incipient Justin, the developing Justin, never grub and chrysalis and moth, but Justin Homunculus, Justin in enlargement, never Justin in growth' (4). The text challenges the reader as well as Laura to resign herself to the lovers' incompatibility, and the probability that Justin may never fully mature and that she may be left a spinster. Her ultimate unromantic self is shaped by the war as well as by her personal resistance to patriarchal norms; Justin's sufferings on the frontline strike at his sense of masculine agency and his feminisation exacerbates the shift of power within their relationship. The war also governed Dane's modernist departures from the conventional resolutions and traditional optimism of the realist text. In *Legend*, Anita is excited by *Eden Walls*' concluding with the heroine's survival as a single woman as a challenge to the 'formula [where] they are all young and beautiful, and they all die', because 'that's the point' (101) and in the same spirit, Dane consciously acknowledges 'in these days a happy ending [. . .] would be so manifestly untrue to life, would be so consequently inartistic' in *First the Blade* (5). She consciously resisted publisher expectations; recording how William Heinemann enquired 'do you mean to say, Miss Dane, that you are not once going to let the hero take the heroine in his arms?', she recalls that she 'couldn't get him to see that this was the point of the story, and we were both a little shocked at each other' (qtd. in Barrow 23). Perhaps mindful of the economic wisdom of providing some hope to readers and publishers, however, she stops short of adopting a completely nihilistic position. The possibility that Justin may survive the war and marry Laura is never totally ruled

out and strategies of counter-realism are adopted to distance the reader from Laura and Justin's plight: the collaborators reassure that 'they're not real people! They're not real troubles! Only marionettes that we have set a-jig-jigging up and down our mantelpiece to make us laugh o' nights, and forget the unending war' (*First* 297).

Despite its apparent contemporaneity, Laura's tale is described as belonging to 'those dogmatical days' (111), safely consigned to a patriarchal past confidently defeated by a more progressive modern present. In the framing chapters which preface and then close the narrative, one collaborator addresses the other from within a secure, creative, female environment, free from patriarchal interference. She invites her to 'draw' the blinds 'close, lest the Zeppelins catch us at our story-telling, whilst I put the carpet to rights again and pile up the logs (we sawed them ourselves didn't we?) upon the fire', cosily remarking that 'now – you have your knitting and I the fountain-pen you gave me: [. . .] and fat, blank scribbling book' (1). Reflecting the independent life which Dane and Arnold shared, the collaborators celebrate their own female narrative apart from the painful events of their story, where the womanly angel has been thoroughly put to sleep and the domestic interior, governed by flourishing female imaginations, is sheltered from external forces: men like Justin who prevent women from chopping their own logs and making their own fires and who once might have compromised their growth and artistry, and the man-made war, whose Zeppelins overhead threaten the feminine spirit of tranquillity – but only from a distance. Separating the events of the narrative from 'real' life softens their gloomy impact and creates a feminist paradox. On the one hand, conceiving Laura's story as remote and detached from the experience of the collaborators reduces its urgency and makes the feminist agenda to raise women's expectations seem less than necessary. On the other, the contented and independent spinster collaborators provide for Dane's female readership important role models of shared authorship and co-operation between women to counter traditional conceptions. Offering the reader an alternative version of domesticity, envisaged in their self-created secure and comfortable home environment in which they are able to control their own destiny, contrasts with Laura's spiritual homelessness at the close of the novel.

Dusty Answer similarly belongs to the group of 'novels published during or immediately after the war [which] set out to [. . .] confront the disruptions to the romantic myth initiated by the death or absence of husbands or lovers' (Ouditt 103). It features painful estrangements between combatants and women on the home front and offers glimpses of harmonious and supportive relationships between women which evoke Laura and Coral's friendship and the narrator-collaborators' union. The Cambridge bedrooms with their cosy fires echo the feminine space where Dane's co-authors plot their subversive narrative and the alternative domestic comfort relished for a while by Clare and Alwynne in

Regiment of Women. Conversing late into the night in relaxed company, as the students 'sat about or lay on the floor, smoked, drank cocoa, ate buns, discussed', Judith 'sat in a corner and watched the firelight caress and beautify their peaceful serious faces; talked a great deal suddenly now and then, and then was silent again, dreaming and wondering' (*Dusty* 130). Her sense of belonging in this female milieu contrasts sharply with her repeated exclusions from male and mixed company. Unable to summon the courage to approach Roddy in Tony's Cambridge rooms, she loitered outside in the cold darkness, shut out from the imagined warmth of the men's union and then 'sprang away from the wall and ran towards the street in her urgent flight from wound, from the deliberate-seeming insult, the cruelty of drawn curtains' (126). The girls on the college bus, on the other hand, wait for and welcome her: 'their little voices and gestures seemed to stroke and pat. They were so glad she had come in time, so considerate and kindly, so safe' (*ibid.*). As her studies at Cambridge come to a close, she regrets that her obsession with Jennifer has meant detachment from her fellow female students, 'so charming, so gentle, so sensitive and intelligent: fascinating creatures: how fascinating she had never troubled to realize and would never now know' (187). Yet although she regrets the missed opportunities for women's friendship, romantic and otherwise, unlike *First the Blade*, the novel stops short of advocating female community as a viable option to marriage.

Like their feminist sisters (May Sinclair, Cicely Hamilton, Rose Macaulay and Rose Allatini), who 'chose to present their novels in the initial guise of stories of romantic love, but departed from the conventions of this genre [so that] their heroines do not finally marry the man of their choice' (Tylee 127), Dane and Lehmann re-evaluate the nineteenth-century romance in the light of the truth of women's experience, challenging normative assumptions in the process. There are key parallels between *First the Blade* and *Dusty Answer*: in their shared anxieties about domestic patriarchal structures, their heroines' aspirations to combine social integration with autonomous identity, and their themes of thwarted romantic love. The initial romantic hopefulness of the female protagonists in both novels shifts to disillusionment and soul-searching epiphany when they are unable to secure suitable husbands and the outcome of both novels is anti-climactic, ambiguous and open. Yet although the end of both novels finds the protagonists culturally stranded and faced with an uncertain and unpredictable future, Judith is the more passive and unwilling victim of romantic rejection. Avoiding some of the unsatisfactory identities proffered by patriarchal culture – to become Martin's traditional wife or a superficial beauty like her mother – suggests the novel's commitment to female autonomy but ultimately 'the deconstruction of romance is accompanied by an intense desire for romance' (Wallace *Sisters* 167) and the necessity to adapt to the gender complexities of the

modern world is barely acknowledged. Judith's frustrated romantic aspirations are treated elegiacally and the presiding theme is the tragedy of romantic loss, as Mariella puts it, 'these ghastly gaps – everybody loving somebody who loves another person' (*Dusty* 294). Lehmann launches her heroine on a quest to read herself and other people which is eclipsed by the narrative's nostalgia for the pre-war world, its lyrical anthem for a war-damaged inter-war youth for whom romantic fulfilment is well-nigh impossible. On the other hand, by transforming its heroine into an independent woman who resists the temptation to 'attain supreme existence through losing oneself in the other' (de Beauvoir 659), and filtering her more naive observations through a worldly and overtly feminist omniscient narrative lens, *First the Blade* proffers a stronger challenge to normative ideology and argues for a fundamental revolution in gender expectations. Indeed, while the title phrase, 'dusty answer' indicates the death of hope and the inevitable failure of the female search for love, 'first the blade' indicates the possibility of women's growth outside of traditional frameworks and reflects the political optimism of Dane's novel as a whole. While Lehmann's subsequent fiction continued to mourn the failure of love, Dane's ensuing novels built on the progressive perspectives of *First the Blade*, enthusiastically embracing the more prosaic post-war zeitgeist in which they were written, with its increasing temporal and spacial possibilities for women's liminality.

Notes

1. *Regiment of Women* was 'adjudged one of the most notable works of fiction published in recent years' ('Popular novelist' *Salt Lake City Deseret News* April 23 1921). *Newsagent* praised it as 'written with great wisdom, efficiency and insight, [which] will delight critical readers' ('*Regiment*' *Scrapbook*) and *Everyman* admired its 'scenes which show extraordinary penetration' ('Another Surprising' *Scrapbook*). *Land and Water* commended the author's 'power of vision [in] a piece of work that is written with [. . .] an easy sense of mastery' (*Scrapbook*), the *Sydenham and Penge Gazette* hailed it as 'a most excellent' novel ('New Sydenham' *Scrapbook*), and the *Weekly Dispatch* claimed that 'it contains one of the subtlest and most powerful pieces of character drawing I have met with in the last five years' ('The World of Books' *Scrapbook*). Reviewers of *First the Blade* included *The Christian World* which considered that 'the whole theme is developed with rare insight' ('First the Blade' *Scrapbook*), the *Liverpool Post* which pronounced it the second of 'two remarkable books to her name' ('A Promising' *Scrapbook*), and the *Saturday Review* which remarked on how Dane had 'improved on a successful first novel by a fine piece of work' (*Scrapbook*). *Common Cause* was of the opinion that 'in literary merit it surpasses *Regiment of Women*' ('First the Blade' *Scrapbook*), *The Liverpool Post* described it as 'a delightful piece of literary workmanship' ('Some New' *Scrapbook*), *Saturday Westminster Gazette* referred to it as 'an analytical novel of no ordinary charm and dexterity' ('New Novels' *Scrapbook*), *Country Life* called it 'a splendid achievement' ('First the Blade' *Scrapbook*) and *Church Family Newspaper* saw it as 'head and

- shoulders above the ordinary novel in ability' ('Full of Ability' *Scrapbook*). The *Globe* considered that 'Miss Dane has repeated the instantaneous and deserved success she achieved with *Regiment of Women*' (*Scrapbook*). *Legend* was variously described as the 'original and successful novel' which 'made her reputation in the literary world' (*Clitheroe Advertiser and Wisconsin State Journal*, July 17 1942), a book 'generally acclaimed as a literary tour de force' (*Salt Lake City Deseret News* April 23 1921), 'the exquisite flowering of that talent so big with promise in her first two books', and was referred to as 'an example of perfect technique' exhibiting 'sheer beauty' (*Melbourne Advocate* May 3 1934).
2. One reporter, for instance, informs the readership that 'Dane has fled the London season to the country' and 'is the most difficult celebrity to secure at a party [. . .] because she really shrinks from social publicity' ('Shy' *Leeds Mercury*, June 15 1921). Another complains that 'it is well nigh impossible to find out anything about her – anything, that is, that you can set down in sober print and know for certain to be true' and described her as 'a reticent woman', that a few brief biographical details are 'all she will let the public know about her' (*Melbourne Advocate* May 3 1934).
 3. She voiced her support for women teachers who wanted to combine career and marriage in *The Women's Side*, writing 'Are they fairly treated? Is it right, bearing the immense responsibility they do to the whole future life of the nation, that they should be, of common knowledge, underpaid, over-worked, denied (in practice) their right to learn their way about the big world, to mix with their fellow-men and women, to marry and have children?' (74). This modern feminist standpoint coheres with the rhetoric of 'The Six Point Group', which has also been somewhat unfairly branded as reactionary when it was actually a well-intentioned feminist organisation. Julien, for instance, accuses it of focussing 'on the social reproduction of girls, not the working conditions of teachers', of having 'only wanted to urge the marriage privilege to get rid of spinster teachers' (118).
 4. One critic remarked, 'the author does not seem as happy with him as with her feminine characters' ('The World' *Scrapbook*), another that he was 'less real – far less real – than the women' and did not 'really matter as the women do' ('Book About' *Scrapbook*).

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4 Domestic Choices

Companionate Marriage or Living as a *Seule Dame*. Rejecting Romance in Gothic and Saga Writing, 1924–1938

Dane's first three novels are structured along the lines of Edwardian narratives of rebellion, with central female protagonists characteristically spatially restricted, living 'more or less in the traditional female realm of the personal and the domestic', the source of their oppression (Eldridge Miller 86 192). Although they begin with a modicum of access to the public sphere – the school, painter's studio and writer's study, their ambitions are either quickly or eventually quashed. Her inter-war texts on the other hand, move away from pre-war patterns in which heroines 'lamented their [domestic] obligations' but failed to break out of their servitude (Briganti and Mezei 6); advancing Laura's narrative of tentative autonomy, they cross the thresholds of patriarchal homes to return revitalised and equipped to usurp patriarchal power or to find alternative places to live, work and thrive. Marriage is treated unsentimentally and becomes, as in other progressive inter-war domestic novels, 'the subject rather than the solution of the plot' (Briganti and Mezei 18). Patriarchs are either feminised or expelled from women's worlds and heroines are increasingly confident about emerging emancipatory possibilities. Many establish modes of living which are only loosely domestic, empty of husbands and children. Widowhood becomes an attractive option or, prepared to denounce the idea that love is a woman's entire existence, women sever bonds with men, cracked by male infidelity and neglect, and choose divorce as a viable alternative. Outside of marriage they achieve fulfilment by means of immersion in joyful gendered-female natural landscapes or in creative and professional contexts, which they claim as their absolute right. Continuing in the unromantic vein of *First the Blade*, in these texts love relationships are vexed with issues experienced by modern women. In 1926 short story 'Spinsters' Rest', a shortage of marriageable men means the protagonist is on the shelf, economically compromised and yearning for maternal fulfilment, and the 1924 novella, *The Lover*, four-volume 1927 novel *The Babyons: The Chronicle of A Family* and 1931 novel *Broome Stages* variously explore husband neglect, infidelity and desertion. Reflecting a time of 'growing divorce statistics' (Humble 227) and a 'relaxation of sexual taboos'

(238), *The Lover* and *Broome Stages* evince a development in literature in which 'sexual experience outside marriage is newly presented as a commonplace part of women's lives' (231). They dramatise the plight of wives threatened by new sexual freedoms and by the very divorce legislation which Dane argued for, which enables other women to seduce their husbands and break apart their marriages.

Sharing with other high-end middlebrow writers a 'horror of the "gush" or "tosh" of the emotionality with which the pre-war bourgeois woman had been burdened' in popular fiction (Light 161), Dane abjured what she termed the 'sob stuff' in these texts. She particularly objected to popular gothic stories, or 'shockers', ubiquitous, 'in every popular magazine that you open, and in every light novel where the plain little typist who slaves for her family is married to the head of the firm' (Dane, 'Things' 32). They were, in her opinion, 'thrilling rubbish' that failed to meet the 'just needs', of the modern woman, to address the issues which really concerned her (*Tradition* 28). This was not tantamount to a wholesale condemnation of the literary 'marvellous', however.¹ Dane's spiritual beliefs extended beyond the parameters of Christian thought, encompassing a wider faith in the preternatural.² This was not an unusual or particularly controversial position to adopt in the inter-war period, despite the secularising and often cynical nature of the zeitgeist. Evolving from a Victorian 'intense interest in spiritualism', the period witnessed a developing cultural fascination with 'psychological phenomena' (Moody 78) and all things ephemeral and unseen.³ Dynamic Psychology, a school of thought which believed in psychic energy and 'psychic reality, as distinct from material, external reality' (Johnson, 2–3), had particularly widespread currency as a force of influence on popular belief and on literature in the early part of the twentieth century, and incidences of the uncanny in Henry James' 1898 novel, *The Turn of the Screw*, with its dual interpretation as the tale of supernatural events or the projections of a troubled mind, firmly established psychic phenomenon as a valid topic for the modern novel, from which followed the 'transition from mind to matter' (Todorov, qtd. in Jackson 50) as a central convention of gothic writing. In a 1920s middlebrow context characterised by an 'abandonment of realism for fantasy and other non-realistic forms' (Lucas qtd. in Wallace, 'Uncanny' 33) and an enthusiasm to 'positively embrace [. . .] the supernatural and paranormal' (Moody 80), shifting from realist text to ghost story in its last few pages, *Legend* marks the beginning of a period in which Dane adopted this popular form: in *The Lover*, 'Spinsters' Rest' and the first and last volumes of *The Babyons*. In *Tradition and Hugh Walpole*, she praised the Brontës' interplay of 'traditive' realism and psycho-spiritual romance, which she believed, had 'coloured the waters of the English novel for all time' (42)⁴ and it seems likely that she emulated the Brontës' method in *The Babyons* by blending the marvellous and realist genres, sandwiching two straight saga instalments between

the opening and closing gothic volumes. This structure was highly commended by the press, including the *Times Literary Supplement*, which remarked upon its 'mixture of the fantastic with the real [. . .] convincingly done by Miss Dane's accomplished pen' ('Babyons' 78).

Seriously exploring female psychology and consciousness using popular genres is not as incongruent as it might appear, but an important gender-political strategy of genre appropriation, through which popular conventions are undermined and normative genre expectations that the textual heroine gains ultimate happiness in marriage are disappointed. Diana Wallace identifies the ghost story genre as an intrinsically subversive female form ('Uncanny'), and according to feminist critics Ellen Moers (126), Anne Williams (103) and Kate Ellis (xiii), feminist gothic, also known as gothic feminism, is a radical subgenre and valid mode of female expression.⁵ Horner and Zlosnik believe 'fantasy was used specially to explore issues of gender' by women writers in the 1920s and they cite Daphne Du Maurier's work as intrinsically 'able to explore through Gothic writing the anxieties of modernity in the kind of fiction many people find accessible' (188). Dane succeeded in doing likewise: while the quotidian real world context inevitably limits *First the Blade* to a conclusion which grounds Laura within a de-limiting pre-feminist environment, reality-defying transformations in Dane's subsequent marvellous narratives open out time and place to reveal extraordinary specifically female liminal spaces, ethereal fairytopian and ghostly dimensions, which oppose the more tangible domain of the controlling masculine symbolic. Into these spaces, Laura's successors escape the oppressions of the repressive cultural order.

Yet Dane's valorisations of the female psycho/spiritual semiotic, in opposition to the logical concrete world of the masculine symbolic, do not preclude a confidence in women's prosaic capabilities, their acumen for business, and her texts trace a gradual reconciliation of semiotic space with a symbolic reconfigured under feminine rule. Rural, fantastical, often pagan places are succeeded by women's successful navigations and negotiations of the patriarchal city. Infiltrating mercantile organisations, her heroines become publishers, actors and theatre managers, transforming the normative gender-power dynamic with their distinctively instinctive and essentialist brand of feminism. This process began in the 1930s, when the family saga or historical chronicle genre succeeded the gothic as the staple diet of middlebrow reading and Dane accordingly turned her hand to this mode of writing, characteristically "saturated with a family's history", one that 'entwined with a community or nation's history' (Briganti and Mezei 26). The form maps the lives of several generations of the same family and dramatises the ways in which its individual members meet the challenges posed by historical change. Female-authored versions of the saga afford subversive possibilities as much as the marvellous genre, and as in the 1920s and 1930s when 'male writers were moving

away from the genre' (Wallace *Woman's* 3), women novelists began to appropriate historical fiction, which in all its forms 'offered to a number of feminist authors [. . .] an opportunity to explore the variety of ways in which women could live their lives, outside the currently legitimate roles of respectable femininity' (Baldick 223). Wallace describes how they 'use[d] the story of [. . .] generations of women to conduct a kind of historical stocktaking, a measurement of the progress made and that still to be attained' (*Woman's* 55). Dane's part realist chronicle, *The Babyons*, was succeeded by a pure saga, *Broome Stages*, in 1931, which is also a hybrid, albeit of different genres, combining saga tropes with conventions associated with the theatre novel. In both texts, Dane examines positive ways of configuring the female self, in the manner of her more obviously radical feminist contemporaries and descendants, Virginia Woolf, Angela Carter and Jeanette Winterson, who also 'used the historical novel to express multiple, complex identities and used them as sites of possibility and potential' (De Groot 67). She charts the rise of multiple generations of women who over the centuries forge ever stronger imaginative and professional identities and integrities, increasingly centred on work, independence and a strong sense of selfhood.

Fantastical Fiction and Female Visionary Experience

Some marvellous tales feature 'the ghost-soul or Doppelganger' (Briggs 12), the spirit of a living character as opposed to revenants from the world of the dead, and *The Lover* is one example. Its plot focuses on an unhappily married middle-aged woman, Hetty Piele, whose husband, Harry, a successful businessman with aspirations to stand for parliament, lives and works in London for most of the week, leaving her to a lonely domestic existence. Childless, and consequently anxious that she has failed to fulfil her prescribed womanly role and satisfy her husband, her marriage is further endangered when Harry becomes involved in an extra-marital relationship. Driven by this to contemplate suicide, Hetty is saved from self-harm by the appearance of an apparition of Harry in her bedroom mirror, transfigured back into the young and ardent lover who he once was, considerably more desirable than his real-life aging self and manifesting the 'mirrored reflections or shadows' of Freud's uncanny (Armitt 50), a 'central image of the literary fantastic' (46).⁶ Drawing him into her room and her arms, she falls back in love with him, and her newly invigorated personality together with local sightings of her with her new 'lover'; make her the subject of village speculation and arouse Harry's suspicions and alarm. Discarding his mistress, he refocuses his rekindled affections on Hetty and resolves to confront her about her 'affair'. Mounting the stairs to their bedroom one night, he hears her laughing with someone on the other side of the door, bursts in, thus breaking the spell, and finds nothing in there but a shadow. Reassured, he becomes reconciled with

Hetty, becoming the loving husband in reality which she has only been able to create in her fantasy.

Previous to her refreshing spectral encounter, Hetty perceives herself as a failure of femininity and at the commencement of the story she 'caught with a sense of shock a sight of herself in the mirror on the wall' (*Lover* 12), a revelation of how the years have made her jaded, middle-aged, unattractive:

Mirror and moonlight exposed her cruelly. She realized for the first time that the years had sharpened her features, that the faint almond-blossom flush of her girlhood had set and dried into the skin about her cheekbones, that her grey hair and girlish figure cancelled out each other and left her ineffectual, unimpressive, a poor wraith of the nineties in a modern frock.

With trembling lip and no pride at all to help her she translated what she saw into her own simple phrases.

I'm growing ugly – she thought – ugly as well as old. . . . It's no wonder I bore him, poor Harry!

(*Lover* 12–13)

Hetty's separation of her younger and older selves, conceptionalised through mirror images, echoes Harry's similar gothic transfiguration, but it also registers the particular importance of mirrored self-reflections to women, the 'self-disgust, the self-hatred, and the impetus to self-destruction that have been increasingly prominent themes in the writing of women in the twentieth century' (Moers 107). Such reflections derive from codes of femininity embedded in a cultural environment in which 'nothing separates female experience from male experience more sharply, and more early in life, than the compulsion to visualise the self' (ibid.). It also stands as a re-experience of the mirror-phase trauma hypothesised by psychoanalytic theorist, Jacques Lacan. He identified a condition in which the psyche develops according to a process in which an infant first recognises the self in the mirror, and with it a comprehension 'that one not only sees, but is also seen, that "I" the subject, am also an object' (Williams 154). This engenders transference from a state of blissful imaginary to the constructed symbolic world of normative values and legalised constrictions wherein prior illusions of completeness are shattered by an understanding of a fundamental lack, thereafter patched over by means of performances of socially requisite false selfhoods. Hetty's revisioned mirror phase is re-imagined in a similar manner by Catherine Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights* and by Dane's own Laura Valentine, but whereas Brontë's famous heroine is unable to regain her authentic and original self except through death, in *First the Blade* and *The Lover*, the semiotic, severed by the mirror stage, is now recovered and the heroines are empowered through their regressions from the symbolic back into the

imaginary. A situation whereby the split subject and position within the symbolic is continually displaced or destabilised by the semiotic becomes tangible in gothic literature in which the uncanny does the disruptive work, haunting the symbolic with its ghosts and phantoms that constitute the return of the repressed. Re-imagining the mirror stage is a triumph for Laura and Hetty's dark semiotic impulses, opening to them the subversive possibilities of the original psychic condition, which bubbles under the surface of female consciousness. Forthwith Hetty evades the symbolic; freeing herself from cultural restraints, she transitions into the night-garden and moonlit woodlands surrounding her house, re-configured as semiotic spaces of unfettered female desire, where she wanders with her compliant and de-masculinised fantasy-lover. Her real-life husband, on the other hand, presides over the masculine-controlled house which is gendered male in the manner of other domestic novels in which routines and trappings of home become dominant metaphors for patriarchal constraints, norms and social expectations which female protagonists internalise and some ultimately resist. In opposition to the oppressive heat of the house in the rational daytime with which Harry is identified, the powerful feminine moonlight lights the way for Hetty's liminality and night-time meanderings; when he directs her to 'come to bed' (*Lover* 23), she responds defiantly, 'I *am* going out, Harry. The moonlight's too mad to miss' (24).

Hetty's tale reflects her modern cultural and legal context as well as her psychic life. A short supply of men and the 'sexual adventuring of the post-war generation' (Humble 216) mean that women like Harry's mistress, having less fear of the social ramifications of moral transgression than their mother's generation, were in a good position and had a strong motive to replace undesirable wives. Yet wives are now more powerful too, able for the first time to break out of emotionally unsatisfactory marriages, or refashion them more to their liking (Bingham 239). Hetty is emancipated by the power of her released semiotic because it enables her to match Harry's extramarital liaison with an affair of her own, however amorphous, which gives her a vantage point from which to begin to view her marriage with sardonic detachment, an understanding that 'so far had she come in the last year from the blackest night of her life that she could label their misshapen relationship comedy, not tragedy now' (*Lover* 58). Dane's reappraisal of Hetty's marriage is characteristic of a flexible middlebrow which was responding to cultural change by making a 'radical reassessment of [. . .] the romance that had been at the centre of previous literary conventions' (Humble 198). It becomes clear that the Piele marriage and Harry with it has fallen victim to Hetty's culturalised feminine romantic aspirations, and this partially absolves Harry from narrative censure, even though he has 'taken and taken and taken until I'm empty' (*Lover* 13). Harry's phantom self plays an important role in her conjugal education, bringing her to a deeper understanding of

her marriage, teaching her to adjust her expectations in order to save it. 'He and I, we were one man, one ordinary man', he reminds her, 'good enough, you know. Good enough to go round. But you [. . .] wouldn't believe that. You left him nothing. You took the best of him out of him, out, away, into yourself' (19). Fashioning the idea of a husband in her imagination as a romantic object of almost religious worship, she enquires 'what had this flesh and blood to do with the dear likeness that she had received into her heart, that hung there still, the altarpiece of a chapel ardent?' (4) and she fails to accept that Harry is real and aging. His transmutation into spectral form constitutes the psychic fulfilment of her emotional quest to separate her idea of him from what he has become, to prise from the middle-aged, corporeal, disappointing Harry, 'flushed and flabby', who 'breathed noisily in his sleep' (*ibid.*), his younger self, imprinted on her romantic memory. Re-aligning the Piele's relationship, *The Lover* demonstrates a modern enthusiasm for a more prosaic companionate style of marriage before the concept had been formally identified and a decade before its representation in literature would 'become matter of course' (Light 18).⁷ Like the men in the work of Du Maurier, Agatha Christie, and many other female-authored texts of the period (170), Harry is riddled with self-doubt and nervous illnesses, typifying the 'newly emotional, psychologically wounded man [which had] become the masculine prototype for the middlebrow woman's novel' (Humble 200). Analogous to his shell-shocked predecessor, Justin Cloud, he is a diminished romantic hero who loses his sense of mastery in the course of the narrative and comes to resemble his 'colourless suburban' middlebrow counterparts (Light 124). The more remote Hetty becomes, the more he values her and his status in the relationship ultimately collapses, his formerly safe world of traditional gender relations overturned. Increasingly uncertain, sickly and tired, he recognises 'how small he was, how lonely' (*Lover* 68), how much he depends on his wife, who, 'lost to him [. . .] was the loss of himself, of his own soul' (72) and his self-hood becomes entirely determined by her regard. While she becomes whole as a result of her adventures, he suffers a crisis of identity and as her confidence grows her introspective musings cease. The closing sections of the narrative become dominated by Harry's expressions of insecurity and, echoing Hetty's anxious interior monologues which open the story, modernist techniques of multiple perspectivisation are employed to present his point of view and reveal his tortured consciousness. Once she has overturned her romantic conception of Harry, Hetty is ready to release the spectre of his younger virile self and accept the flesh-and-blood version, the defeated middle-aged man that he has become, in need of her sympathy and protection. Thus she makes the 'intricate navigations across domestic, semi-private, outdoor settings' including 'private homes and gardens' which Reus Gómez and Gifford observe in the lives of other fictional women, and like them she strives for and indeed achieves 're-assimilation in alternative structures'

(10) to that imposed by the formerly traditional marriage in which she was subordinated. She uses her female imagination to enter the semiotic and reclaim a best self, returning to the symbolic with the confidence to end her oppression, recast her marriage along modern companionable lines and re-address the balance of power to her advantage.

In *First the Blade*, Dane employs metaphors related to inexorable forces of nature to convey the power of the semiotic to effect Laura's mystical epiphany, and she employs the same strategy to describe the permeation of boundaries between self and other, reality and fantasy in *The Lover*: prior to her full psychic experience, undermining the 'hard-trodden surfaces of [Hetty's] nature' or her culturally constructed symbolic self, the semiotic, or imaginary, has already begun to seep through 'the small cracks [. . .] ever reappearing through which would spurt up from the depths odd fumes and flickers of phantasy or surmise or belief' (*Lover* 5). This figurative trope is also deployed by May Sinclair in her account of 'our psychic life' as 'not a water-tight compartment', but a vessel with 'porous walls [. . .] continually threatened with leakage and the flooding in of many streams' (qtd. in G. Johnson 111). Indeed, there are strong similarities between the psychic experience in Sinclair's short story 'The Villa Désirée' (originally published in Cynthia Asquith's 1926 compilation of short stories, *The Ghost Book*), and the fantastical scenario which underpins *The Lover*. Like Dane's, Sinclair's 'evocation of the supernatural [. . .] combined a Freudian awareness of symbolic displacement with a Jamesian projection of ghosts as representing states of mind' (Seed, qtd. in Wallace, 'Uncanny' 61), and derived from her belief in the principles of Dynamic Psychology, which evolved during her association with the Medico-Psychological Clinic from 1913 and the Society for Psychical Research from 1914. Through these institutions, she became cognisant with Freud's theory of the uncanny, borrowing the term for the title of her 1923 collection of ghostly short stories, 'The Uncanny',⁸ which explore 'psychic phenomena [as] metaphor[s] for projection of inner states' (Johnson 107). Dane was full of praise for these tales, referring to one of them as 'great art' (Things that go' 138), and parallels between the two writers were noted at the time. *Legend's* 'sharp, clear, biting style' reminded Sheila Rand, columnist of 'The Winnipeg Evening Tribune', of Sinclair's work and she identified in both authors 'an uncanny understanding of their own sex', how 'the heart, the mind and the physical desires of women are laid bare' in their work, the ways in which they 'express in words their understanding, so that we too, glimpse the mysteries and complexities of women' ('Who is Clemence Dane?' May 1 1920). She even wondered if Dane, a 'mystery writer' about whom little was known before the 1920s, was Sinclair herself, or even that Sinclair 'was so inspired by *Legend* that she could not refrain from telling the story in her own way' – in one of her tales, 'Fame', published just months after Dane's novel (*ibid.*).

Dynamic Psychology provided a framework for both writers to explore the modern anxieties of their female protagonists, and phantasms in their psychic stories similarly inadvertently rescue them from their worst fears: a precarious and powerless position within a loveless, faithless marriage in *The Lover* and sexual cruelty in 'The Villa Désirée'. When 'The Villa' opens, Mildred Eve is preparing to embark on a journey to the south of France, where her fiancé, Louis Carson, is to join her a few days later; she plans to stay in his villa while for he sake of moral decency, he intends to book into a local hotel. Like Dane, Sinclair undermines the outmoded concept of the romantic hero. Louis performs the part of romantic suitor, kissing his lover's feet and running alongside her departing train from where he 'tossed the roses into her lap' ('Villa' 3) and Mildred comes to see beyond his empty courtship masquerades when she is confronted with the animal reality of a male sexuality which his romantic gestures seek to conceal. On her arrival at her Mediterranean destination, she is greeted by her friends, Rolf and Martha Deering, who are honeymooning in the area. Their companionable marriage is the modern antithesis of Mildred and Louis' ardent but destructive romance. Cynical, and deeply suspicious of Louis' motives, in the manner of the sleuthing marriages 'figured in almost entirely comradely terms' characteristic of 1930s detective fiction (Humble 210), they investigate his sexual machinations. Discovering that he 'was always having women with him' at the villa, 'not particularly nice women' at that ('Villa' 14) and a 'young [. . .] bride' who had reputedly died there 'hadn't been his wife' (10), the couple sniff out the sensual odours and atmosphere of its rooms, picking up sexual resonances in the clinging and feminine curved furniture, the 'French and fragile [. . .] gilt chairs and settees carved like picture frames round the gilded cane', and the 'hot light [which] beat in through the long windows open to the terrace, drawing up a faint powdery smell from the old floor' (4), which warn of the fate which awaits Mildred there. Mildred's naive observation, 'it does look a little queer and – un-lived in', meets with Martha's modern worldly rejoinder: 'I should say [. . .] it had been too much lived in, if you ask me' (5), and the Deerings' suspicions are fully realised, it seems, when a phantasmorically transformed Louis breaks into the villa that night and attempts to seduce Mildred. In a process which is the reverse of Harry's spectral improvement, Louis' flesh-and-blood 'personal magic' and 'almost abnormal beauty' (2) are supplanted by a grotesquely hideous predatory masculinity and his veiled moral decrepitude is laid bare. Unlike her biblical namesake, Miss Eve flees in horror from sexual temptation, taking refuge with Rolf and Martha, and the next morning she receives a puzzling letter from Louis, announcing that he has arrived by train only that morning. Her attempts to persuade Rolf and Martha that her experience in the bedroom had been a psychic event, a telepathic warning of what Louis has in store for her, fall on deaf ears and her friends' 'stolidity, their unbelief' (15) convince them that she has

been attacked by a very real Louis, 'rather an appalling beast' (14), who has subsequently used his Machiavellian cunning to cover his tracks.

Mildred appears to have had a lucky escape from the debauchery to which her predecessors were subjected, and the story can be interpreted as a moral fable about the need to be vigilant in protecting one's chastity. Yet Rolf and Martha's truth-bearing status is questionable. First, by discrediting Mildred's uncanny experience with their oppositional logic, they undermine their author's own dynamic psychological viewpoint. Second, their physical squeamishness, apparent from their attitude to their honeymoon – 'what rot! We've got over *that* silliness. Anyhow, it's our third week of it' ('Villa' 4) – might well observe the middlebrow convention which disclaims and underplays romance in a marriage, expecting the reader 'to pick up the strong emotional subtext', and understand 'reticence' as 'the key guarantor of emotional- and – especially – romantic authenticity' (Humble 210), but it also makes them appear somewhat 'detached and cool', too chilly with each other ('Villa' 4). It seems plausible that Sinclair does not intend her cautionary tale to side with conventional moral decency. After all, the eroticised 'high white-painted bed [. . .] quivering in the stillness, with the hot throb, throb of the light' (5), evokes a mood of sexual anticipation which challenges Mildred's professed terror and disgust with the 'frightful and obscene' (11) nature of the 'unearthly abominations' (12) of masculine sexuality. Indeed, as she 'struggled against wave after wave of faintness' (ibid.), her response to Louis' sexual advances is imbued with orgasmic connotations, and the feminine adjective 'désirée' in the story title perhaps signifies the villa as the locus for female desire as much as for Louis' perversions. As Mildred declines the transcendent erotic possibilities symbolised by the visitation in favour of the terra firma of received sexual morality, the ghastly phantasm is quite feasibly a projection of her unhealthy sexual anxiety and a warning against failure of sexual courage and the damaging repressions of illicit desire. This is certainly the message inscribed in Sinclair's other writings, in which 'mystical union' (2) between man and woman is often presented as an over-valued commodity: in *The Three Sisters* (1914) for instance, which connects Gwendolen's sexual self-denial with her breakdown.⁹ Like Hetty, Mildred is disheartened with her mirrored reflection and even 'angry with the face in the glass with its foolish mouth gaping' (9), but while Hetty's encounter with herself in the mirror returns her to the liberating imaginary, from whence she is able to create a stronger identity and disempower her newly-feminised husband, Mildred remains imprisoned within her socially constructed and prudish identity and is perhaps more the kind of 'weak person who fails to overcome circumstance in order to attain individuation', which George Johnson observes in some of Sinclair's other work (142). Although *The Lover* sidesteps controversy by containing its heroine's sexual desire within the legitimate bounds of marriage, Hetty's triumph signifies a narrative insurrection against the patriarchal order nevertheless.

The Lover is the only one of Dane's fantastical texts to soften its rebellions by keeping a lingering faith with the creed of marriage as a means of fulfilment for women. Subsequently, she focuses on what Maroula Joan-nou calls the '“dame seule” theme' (85); during their rites of passage, her key protagonists undergo sympathetic and positive redefinitions as either unmarried women, widows or divorcees. 'Spinsters' Rest', the story of Mary Pawle, a single London-office clerk in her late twenties, which also first appeared in Asquith's *The Ghost Book*, exemplifies the modernist-feminist short-story, concerned to give voice to 'peripheral members of society' (A. Smith 163). Described in the press as 'subtle, perfectly conveying [...] the sense of a shadowy half-world lying between the tangible and the unknowable' ('Short Stories' *The Scotsman*, Nov 28 1935), it is told through 'faery', which Dane judged as well-placed to satisfy discerning modern readers suffering from 'boredom' with 'the horror school' of writing which was glutting the marketplace (*Tradition* 157). As a feminist sub-generic fantasy model, faery was favoured by other inter-war writers including Naomi Mitchison, who found that 'matters which could not be located in contemporary Britain could reach readers if they were situated in the [...] realm of fable or fantasy', and duly employed 'fairy tale mode to disarm us' (Maslen 4, 39), and its roots are traceable to the 'literature of estrangement' tradition of radical female-authored Victorian fantasy and science fiction.

Dane's faery tale is a feminist revision of Grimm's 1909 fairytale, 'Mother Holle', alternatively known as 'Mother Hulde', in which a mystical old woman receives a girl into her enchanted domain and rewards her goodness by restoring her to the everyday world with magical gifts to enable her to flourish there.¹⁰ Set in a time of cultural modernity, 'Spinsters' Rest' updates the faery elements, foreshadowing the emergence of magic realism later in the twentieth century. Focalised through Mary's point of view, it radically revises received truths associated with old tales to promote an alternative vision of female fulfilment. Although Mary belongs to an emerging generation of inter-war working women, she feels far from emancipated, and finds her work hard, menial, and monotonous. In addition, after having been recently jilted by her lover, she is damaged goods, out of the marriage market and her social status has dwindled. Yet she mourns more for the child she will now never have than for her truant boyfriend. In order to escape her miserable city life, she takes a live-out position in a large country house called Spinsters' Rest, as a paid daily companion to a benevolent old woman who heals her with white magic. The woman gives Mary the modern equivalent of the magical task of the original fairy tale, making her responsible for the supervision of a group of underprivileged children who come from London once a year for a party given in the grounds. When a crippled boy goes missing during his visit and none of his relatives care enough to investigate his disappearance, Mary becomes intrigued, having last seen

him ascend the staircase of the house during the party, just as she sees the daily charwoman do every Sunday morning, before reappearing at the end of the day. The old woman reveals to her that the two have vanished into a fairy-tale place, and she gives her permission to make the same journey. Consequently, Mary is transported into the enchanted space where she stays until the old woman, conjurer of the vision, suddenly dies, at which precise moment she is magically returned to the garden at the back of Spinsters' Rest. All set to withdraw with a sad heart to London, looking round the house for the last time, she is granted her wish, a redemptive gift, the lost boy. Finding him sitting on a windowsill, she takes him back to the city to raise as her own.

Spinsters' Rest has long been a sanctuary for distressed single women and Mary's benefactress is the last in a line of good presiding women: as her landlady informs her, 'there's always been a lady living there' ('Spinsters' 172), 'a friendly person' (171). Once a nunnery managed by a kindly medieval prioress, the house epitomises the institutional values of the convent in other women's fiction, an 'object of desire [. . .] an attractive, and sadly lost, alternative for single Protestant women [. . .] a place of refuge' for those with 'no means of financial support', characterised by 'good works that women in positions of authority could accomplish' (Delamotte 162). It is also the locus of pagan female history, one of Dane's particular interests. Before having been 're-sanctified . . . as a Christian fane' ('Spinsters' 173), it was inhabited by a goddess, a 'temple in Roman times, of – Minerva, possibly' (ibid.) and Mary's landlady provides a pagan account of the antiquity and function of the house, of a compassionate, originally non-Christian female lineage decreed in local folklore and gossip: 'not board-school, miss, but – well, they say so, hereabouts' (ibid.). As the representative of the established church, perturbed that the old woman currently in residence is 'not (he lowered his voice), a communicant' (ibid.), the local rector polices the discourse surrounding the house, dismissing local rumours as myth in order to uphold the authority of patriarchal religion and telling Mary that 'in the sixth century [. . .] all records were obliterated' and the only certainty is that it was 'a nunnery in later years' (ibid.). Female paganism operates as the redemptive force which rescues Mary.¹¹ 'Mother Holle', the faery/witch godmother, is recast in the fashion of a character intrinsic to nineteenth-century women's revisionist fairy stories, the 'quasimythological figure [who] will [. . .] restore the broken female vision' (Auerbach and Knoepfelmacher 7). She heals Mary with creative enterprise: stories, folk songs and magical knitting, and to Mary, it 'seemed as if the long thin needles were [. . .] busy, not with threads of wool, but fantastic notions, threads of sunlight' ('Spinsters' 180).¹²

At around the time that she was working on 'Spinsters' Rest', Dane wrote a glowing review of *Lolly Willowes* by Townsend Warner, calling it her 'mistress piece' with a 'supernatural-made-natural' narrative

technique, adapted 'to her purpose [. . .] perfectly' ('First Flights' 176). Although *Lolly Willowes* is not an adaptation of any specific traditional tale, a similitude can be observed between the two texts. Both writers employ tropes of pastoral female space, pagan myth and fairy tale in opposition to normative Christianity to imagine alternative domains for women outside the oppressions of the symbolic where, as Donawerth and Kolmerten observe in literature of estrangement texts, 'gender will not be so limiting as in their own experience' (4). Both heroines are unhappy London spinsters who retreat to rustic communities where magic re-vitalises their lives in narratives which destabilise traditional ideas about Christian refuge. Longing to live in a village called Great Mop, Lolly reads about its eighteenth-century alms-houses, designed and constructed by women, originally free from the control of patriarchal charity but now subsumed within it under a twentieth-century regime which refuses admittance to single women. This reminds Lolly of the precarious nature of her cultural position, the fact that 'had she been born a deserving widow, life would have been simplified' (*Lolly* 88). Moving to Great Mop regardless, she finds a better refuge in a local cottage where she forms a companionship with the closet witch living there, her landlady, Mrs Leak. An image of 'the two women sat by the fire, tilting their glasses and drinking in small peaceful sips' (118) contrasts markedly with the endless sterile evenings which Lolly used to spend in London under the jurisdiction of her oppressive religious sister-in-law, and is reminiscent of Ann Thackeray Ritchie's re-telling of 'The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood' and 'Beauty and the Beast' through an independent spinster storyteller-character who, sitting comfortably cosy next to her female friend, each on 'either side of the warm hearth', is empowered to deconstruct narratives of the patriarchal order because her 'own sexual segregation [. . .] allows her to treat marriage plots with wry detachment' (Auerbach and Knoepfelmacher 14). This strategy of employing a partnership of women to frame the patriarchal narrative antedates Dane's similar method in *First the Blade*, whose own female writer-collaborators also spin a tale from the security of their husband-free fireside, detached from the gender-related trials which oppress the central protagonist of their story. These two scenarios of alternative domesticity also anticipate Mother Holle's protective relationship with Mary as well as and Lolly and Mrs Leak's shared emancipation, and a vein of lesbian nuanced harmony strikes a subtextual chord in all four narratives.

Living in London, Lolly's 'mind was after something that eluded her experience, a something that was shadowy and menacing, and yet in some way congenial; [. . .] a kind of ungodly hallowedness' (*Lolly* 76), and she finds what she has been searching for in Great Mop's occultist coven, to which she is introduced by Mrs Leak. Like their Victorian female antecedents, Dane and Townsend Warner reverse the usual dichotomisation operating in patriarchal fairy tales between bad witch and good princess, interrogating traditional representations of the spinster-witch figure

endemic in mythos. Dane draws on her knowledge of pagan mythology as a deconstructive feminist strategy, and Townsend Warner, influenced by Margaret Murray's 1921 research on the occult, deploys 'imagery of witchcraft to represent female resistance to hetero-patriarchal conventions' (Palmer 121). Both also proffer analogies between witch-hunts of the past and present-day prejudices against spinsters, predating an upsurge in witch-symbolism among 1960s' and 1970s' women writers who foregrounded 'the interplay between history and legend, past and present-day cultures' (122). Lolly's awakening in *Great Mop* brings her to an empathetic reconsideration of the witch-figure: she mentally revisits 'a picture she had seen long ago [. . .] about the persecution of the witches' (*Lolly* 180) and begins to 'see all over England, all over Europe, women living and growing old, as common as blackberries, and as unregarded' (234). Likewise, Mary witnesses how valued the women who have lived at Spinsters' Rest have always been in the local community for opening their doors to the sick: healing the wounded with herbal remedies. She understands how the rector's dislike of the old woman's power is a milder form of the vilification of witches under earlier patriarchal authorities and 'shudder[s]' to think that once 'they took the woman of the house to be a witch and swam her and stretched her, and burnt her at last on her own doorstep' ('Spinsters' 172).

The origin of the term spinster is highly important to Dane's feminist fable. Looking up the dictionary definition: 'spinster – an unmarried woman – so called because she was supposed to occupy herself with spinning' ('Spinsters' 178), Mary comes to grasp the significance of the house, ambiguously named after both the spinsters who first established it and the spinster-spinners who have historically come to it as a place of refuge. Residents past and present consist of Minerva, the first female presence, 'patroness of spinners' (173), kindly witches who spun stories and effected magical redemptions, traditional women weavers, and their modern industrial counterparts. The precariousness of spinsters' working life is a key feminist theme, and single women's working history can be read in the historical annals of Spinsters' Rest and through the past life of the charwoman granted rest in the upstairs rooms:

'She's had a sad life. She's a spinner' said the old lady. 'That's why her back's bent double'.

'A weaver, you mean? I thought that hand looms –'

'Factory-work, I mean,' said the old woman. 'Isn't it factories now? It was looms once. But always the spinning-wheel, my dear, behind it. Call it what you like, it works out the same. [. . .] Fourpence an hour – sweating, don't you call it, in your London? Sweat of the spinners, it waters the earth. Bend 'em and break 'em, the women who spin, plenty more where they come from.'

(177)

This old weaver heads the way for Mary, who becomes the next in a long line of oppressed and exploited surplus single working women granted the gift of liminality by the old woman into a magical realm beyond the empirical reality of the house. The journey involves a kind of psychic regression from the symbolic back into the pre-oedipal semiotic. Lulled into a trance by the stories told by her surrogate spinner-mother, she enters the hazy psychic dream-space of the imaginary where she 'let herself wander, as she had not done for twenty years, into the half light, the half consciousness of that accessible middle land that a child enters so easily, and that some children grow never too old to enter' (165–6). While the ground floor of the house represents the symbolic, and narrative events which occur there remain within the bounds of plausible normative reality, from the child's room at the top of the house, which Mary recognises as 'her own [. . .] but whether the nursery of her yesterday or tomorrow she could not tell' (187), she accesses an enchanted world and the imaginary is given full reign in this parallel world of alternative possibilities. She experiences what Gilbert and Gubar call the 'rising' of 'the resurrected continent' (Gilbert and Gubar 100–1), the fantasy-geographical embodiment of the body of the mother, forever lost to women following their entry into the symbolic. Mary's discovered landscape is soft, warm, beautiful and fluid, replete with womb-watery 'meandering river with its white scarves of ranunculus [. . .] gilded meadows, and trees heavy with heat, [. . .] vaporous hills, [. . .] purple yard of ocean' ('Spinsters' 194). It recalls Christina Rossetti's 'Mother Country', sought, as Gilbert and Gubar point out, by the female speaker in this eponymous 1868 poem, who enquires in vain: 'Oh what is that country/And where can it be/Not mine own country/But dearer far to me?'.¹³ Lolly and Mary fare better than Rossetti's dispossessed protagonist, achieving a space of belonging, both psychological and geographical, within a community of women unimpeded by demands of the patriarchal symbolic. Whereas Lolly's pagan retreat is under the jurisdiction of a masculine devil figure, Mary's utopia is gendered female; with the exception of the lost boy, it is peopled exclusively by single women and constitutes 'her own country and her own kind' ('Spinsters' 191). There is a similitude between Dane's feminist-inflected sister/motherland and the co-operative non-hierarchical female utopias inscribed in the literature of estrangement, all-female rural communities providing 'seclusion from the world of men', offering a 'good life [. . .] that nurtures them instead of one that silences them' (Donawerth and Kolmerten 5, 13), and endowing heroines who have been marginalised in dominant culture a 'subject position' within it (5).¹¹ Dane's egalitarian feminist paradise is a peaceable, rural alternative to the urban spaces defined by patriarchal, capitalist, militarist ideology, a retreat from negative modes of modern living that provoked ambivalent feelings in many modernist writers. Taking her place in this heavenly queendom is a fictionalised version of royal spinster, Queen Elizabeth I,

dwelling on equal terms with ordinary women from various historical époques. Many are spinner-wordsmiths, telling women's stories; one, 'a spindle in her hand, singing to herself as she sat on the edge of a well' enunciates 'in a strange language' ('Spinsters' 191), evocative of Kristevian semiotic jouissance.

'Spinsters' Rest' is perhaps naïve in promoting a fantasy of single parenthood without a sense of the hardships which Mary is likely to endure back in the city and her promotion of normative beliefs that womanly completeness evolves from maternity is problematically antithetical to the doctrine of feminist utopian novels from and beyond the late-nineteenth century which proposed 'collective or mechanical alternatives' to the housework and childcare that constitute women's work' (Pfaelzer qtd. in Donawerth and Kolmerten 7), and to the strong tendency in radical female-authored middlebrow fiction to be 'dismissive of motherhood' and make 'a radical refusal' of this 'defining element[s] of femininity' (Humble 222–3). Yet Dane's story corresponds fully to an initiative in Edwardian feminist novels to uphold the sanctity of motherhood but not the importance of marriage; to represent childlessness as a tragedy, 'felt far more acutely than the loss of a lover or a potential husband' (Eldridge Miller 108). Mary considers 'husband – love – troublesome, [. . .] rather hateful; but to be put up with, you know, because of children' ('Spinsters' 163), and her antipathy towards marriage challenges the ideologies which shore up womanly conduct narratives. Dane's social context also radicalises her tale in ways that Townsend Warner's fails to do. Lolly too owns a 'temperamental indifference to the need of getting married' (*Lolly* 26), embracing organised witchcraft as an alternative to patriarchal family life to enable her 'to have a life of one's own, not an existence doled out to you by others' (239) but while a monetary allowance facilitates her permanent place in her utopia, Mary is ultimately obliged to return to the real world. Although strengthened by her magical encounter, and made ready for maternal fulfilment by having being 'mothered' there, she is of a lower social class than Lolly and without her private income, she will continue to struggle economically and the inevitable necessity of her return to a modern urban working environment injects an element of cultural realism into the text. She is also twenty years younger than Lolly, whose maiden-aunt dependency begins in 1902 in what was likely to have been considered by readers as a now defunct cultural period. Mary's cultural circumstances, on the other hand, are those of the modern woman, and by depicting her social alienation, Dane illustrates how gender demarcations continue to plague spinster-women in her own times. Furthermore, 'Spinsters' Rest' champions a feminist cause which would not be espoused until much later in the century: the single woman's right for a child. However, in relation to Maroula Joannou's central criterion for feminist inter-war fiction, which she believes is met by Townsend Warner in her exploration

of 'the wider options that should be open to the increasing numbers of women whose minds did not travel along the smooth road to matrimony' in *Lolly Willowes* which counters the widespread 'resilient and [. . .] common' culturally hegemonic myths which dismiss spinsters as 'frustrated' and 'desperate to find a man', in 'interminable waiting, for a husband who never quite materialises' (Joannou 78, 83–88), both stories can be defined as feminist. Each writer progressively equates paganism and witchcraft with 'marriage resistance and an independent life-style' much earlier than their 1970s' feminist descendants, who more routinely adopted this narrative position (Palmer 123).

'Spinsters' Rest' undoubtedly venerates motherhood, corresponding to Dane's onetime somewhat problematic claim that 'nobody pretends that falling in love and getting married and having healthy children is not the most important thing in life' ('The Sea and the Sex' 73). Yet not being a eugenisist Dane also argued that a woman's traditional role 'is not the only thing, nor the only interesting one' (ibid.) and it only means 'death to the normal woman *without a creative profession* to go without love and children' (*Women's* 128; my italics). Dane's point is that while marriage and motherhood are undoubtedly desirable, fulfilment is equally achievable through creative practice, and this is the argument expressed in all of her fiction written after 'Spinster's Rest', to an extent already made through narrative endorsements of Sydney's acting ambitions, Laura's painting, Anita's writing and Joan's dress-designing business. This position is more fully developed in the last volume of *The Babyons*, entitled *Lady Babyon*. This text traces the archetypal plot trajectory of female gothic writing,¹² in which a heroine employed by a wealthy family with an ancestral house and a troubled history becomes romantically involved with the attractive but slightly sinister master and haunted by the resident female ghost: 'the other woman, the sinister housekeeper, the madwoman in the attic, the master's dead wife' (Williams 101–2). Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is the most famous example of female gothic; its classic plot and thematic concern with patriarchal lineage, romance, marriage and female independence famously influenced du Maurier's *Rebecca* (102) and is also likely to have inspired *Lady Babyon*, perhaps accounting for the broad similarities between the three texts. *Lady Babyon* fuses gothic – whose conventions demand the kind of ultimate rational explanation for supernatural events which mark the outcomes of *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* – with the ghost story genre, with its denials of the comforting resolutions of realism, whose events are 'super natural [. . .] it is truly the dead who return, and there is no place for rational explanation or artifice' (Gilbert qtd. in Wallace, 'Uncanny' 57). By overruling gothic verisimilitude with otherworldly affirmations of the spirit world, Dane subscribes to a ghost-story form which Wallace believes works to authenticate female intuition, sacred knowledge and alternative truth positions.

In *Lady Babyon*, Antonina Drury, a middle-class Londoner, marries Sir Nicholas Babyon of Devon, and her new Cornish mansion home, Babyon Court, becomes for her an archetypal place of terror in the female gothic tradition, 'an enclosed space that should have been a refuge from evil but has become the very opposite, a prison' (Ellis, Kate 13) when she finds it is haunted by the ghosts of her husband's female ancestors. The first of these is Hariot Babyon, whose romantic rejection by her cousin, Jamie Babyon, and precipitation into 'madness' and suicide two hundred years previously is dramatised in the first volume of the Babyon quartet: *Third Person Singular*. Analogous to Rochester's inability to efface Bertha through loving Jane and Maxim's failure to erase the memory of his crime against Rebecca by taking a second wife, Nicholas' marriage to Antonina is an ineffectual defence against the curse which befell the Babyon dynasty in the wake of Hariot's death, now wrecking his life. In *Jane Eyre* and other gothic texts, 'the death of [the] vengeful and passionate Other Woman means that "she" is no more able to trouble the heroine's prospects of domestic felicity' (Delamotte 156); in modern gothic constructions, however, *Rebecca* and *Lady Babyon* included, 'death, the most supreme form of self-destruction, serves as a form of recomposition' (Bronfen qtd. in Horner and Zlosnik 105) and Mrs De Winter and Antonina become engaged in battles with female revenants whose invincible return symbolises the stranglehold of the patriarchal past, preventing their husbands from overcoming history, which threatens their marriages. The pervasive influence of the dead women in both texts instigates emotional and physical decline in their patriarchs, who are distinctly modernised versions of the traditional gothic hero-villain. Characteristic of the zeitgeist's redefinitions of fictional men as vulnerable and effeminate, visible throughout Dane's work, Nicholas becomes helpless, sick and dependent on Antonina, just as Maxim typifies Du Maurier's 'boys who never grow up', whose wives, 'finally older and wiser than their men, [. . .] come in the end to mother them' (Light 171).

Both Maxim and Nicholas select young wives specifically to bear children and ensure the continuation of the paternal line. In order to secure the male succession, Nicholas 'intended to marry and wanted a son' (*Lady* 280); his growing indifference towards Antonina temporarily abates when she becomes pregnant, at which time he unashamedly 'exalted the mother above the wife' (299), only to return when she miscarries the baby. *Rebecca* proves less invested in modern feminist values than *Lady Babyon* in its treatment of Maxim's obsession with male primogeniture. While this is not made explicit or critiqued in *Rebecca* and the text condones Maxim's wife-murder committed in order to protect his lineage and prevent his succession from the taint of corrupt blood, *Lady Babyon* condemns Nicholas for prioritising his position within a dying patriarchal aristocracy over his marriage. Furthermore, while *Rebecca* is a lesson in decorous feminine conduct complete with traditional anti-feminist

dichotomy between Mrs de Winter's passive virtue and Rebecca's active wickedness, *The Babyons* challenges binary oppositions endlessly reproduced in patriarchal fiction between the angelic heroine and vilified witch, by centring the narrative conflicts not on the differences between good and bad women, but on power struggles between all women and the patriarchal family, their net of entrapment. By removing Rebecca from the narrative before it begins, effectively erasing her point of view which lingers on only in traces filtered through Mrs Danvers' warped perspective, du Maurier privileges Maxim's masculinist perspective on his first marriage. In *The Babyons*, on the other hand, very likely influenced by Cathy's disembodied and defiant endeavour to commune with the living in *Wuthering Heights*, the wronged women return in spectral form to tell their own stories of patriarchal oppression in the more radical tradition of female-authored ghost narratives that 'offer critiques of male power' (Wallace, *Uncanny* 57). Dane expressed enthusiasm for a method which she particularly admired in Sinclair's work, of telling a ghost story to us 'from the point of view of the ghost!' with 'the heart of the disembodied creature revealed to us, in all its fears and desires' ('Things that go bump' 138). Grasping Sinclair's place within a specifically female introspective narrative tradition, she wrote, 'what attracts her is not so much the ghost story as the ghost [which] is perhaps because she is a woman [and] most women write from the inside outwards' (136). While Sinclair's collection features unhappy male and female spectral visitations in equal measure, however, Dane concentrates her own attentions exclusively upon the ghosts of troubled women. Hariot's ghostly interference impedes Antonina's marriage as Bertha Rochester caused an obstacle to Jane's, but Dane refuses to demonise her and the opinion of the *Times Literary Supplement* that she is a 'wicked, frustrated eighteenth-century spinster' ('Babyons' 78) is exceedingly contestable. A diagnosis of insanity gives Hariot's family carte blanche to confiscate her inheritance, and according to patriarchal law which stipulates that it can be returned to her only by order of a husband, any kind of financial autonomy is perilously dependent on marrying a man who is willing to sign it over to her. She longs to marry Jamie Babyon, but he rejects her because she is singularly unfeminine. She 'is unseemly in his eyes', talks to him 'as if he were a schoolboy', has 'unpowdered hair as no woman wore it' (*Third Person* 6), employs 'free utterance and gesture' (8) and her 'eyes, so black and bright' pose too much of 'a challenge' (3) for him to consider her for his wife. Indeed, her vitality repulses him, reminds him of an exotic woman on a Greek ceramic, 'a black woman on a red ground, writhing round a vase, a sight he should have seen last year on his tour, not now, home in safe, sunny England' (12). Menella, the woman he does choose, is the antithesis of Hariot's dark female wilfulness; her 'tendrils of fair hair, dropped lids and a sweet glance asleep behind them' (3) indicate that she has 'conformed' (6). While these oppositions between passionate

odious alien and rational English heroine recall Bertha and Jane in *Jane Eyre*, Jamie's xenophobic vilification of Hariot is perspectivalised as fundamentally unsound. When marriage fails to materialise, her options are the madhouse or suicide and she is less witch than victim of the oppressions meted out to her by her paterfamilias. Through the text's perspective on her rebelliousness and consequent incarceration, the radical spirit of female-authored inter-war ghost fiction operates, which treats spectral-women not as menacing but 'derelict' or 'ghost like' because of 'their exclusion or abandonment outside the symbolic order' (Wallace, 'Uncanny Stories' 57). Hariot speaks of her death and re-embodiment in political terms, that 'they took away my body, [. . .] locked all the doors and there I was naked outside the doors of life', and her plaintive appeal to be brought in from the cold because, 'it's so silent where I am – outside' (*Third Person* 11–12) is a consciously feminist re-enactment of Cathy's ghostly wailing for an autonomy predicated upon re-admittance to *Wuthering Heights*. Hariot is subjugated by the tyrannies of patriarchal law, theorised in Michel Foucault's late twentieth-century deconstructive analysis of the institutional application of arbitrary medical 'truths' regarding sanity and madness (Eagleton, Terry 90). Challenging the grand metanarratives, Dane demonstrates too how economies of power operating in the eighteenth century use psycho-medical discourse to prevent Hariot from gaining access to her income, and her point connects her novel with the work of her feminist contemporaries, which also 'reverses patriarchally preferred interpretations of events and hierarchies of knowledge' (Moody 78).

Masculinist oppressions at Babyon House extend over the time period of the novels and Antoninia's youthful early-twentieth-century antipathy towards marriage is fully warranted when her modern aspirations to travel and paint are crushed on meeting and marrying Nicholas. Just as *Rebecca* 'provides a kind of commentary on the instability of women's sense of themselves when everything they do or say needs the approval and imprimatur of men' (Light 178), *Lady Babyon* dramatises Antonina's diminishing independence, growing sense of insecurity, and increasing reliance on her husband's opinion of her. In both novels, the male protagonists become preoccupied with estate work and increasingly estranged from their marriages, leaving their wives defenceless against the destructive impulses of their dead predecessors who seek to drive them from the house. However, Mrs de Winter's acceptance and passivity is the opposite of the survivalist strategies which Antonina adopts to defuse the ghostly machinations of Hariot and the three ensuing generations of female Babyon ancestresses. While Mrs de Winter's over-active, obsessive and self-destructive imagination causes her to misread Maxim's feelings, leading to an intensification of her endemic anxiety, in a triumph of women's positivity and imaginative powers, Antonina, with narratively privileged visionary capabilities characteristic of many of Dane's

exceptional heroines, is able to empathise and connect with the ghostly women. Consequently, she transforms the troubled house and her status therein, reclaims Babyon women's history, reassesses her marriage, gains self-knowledge and a strong sense of identity, and achieves emotional and economic emancipation. In literature and social studies, the garden is often conflated with the masculinist house which sits within it, identified as a space of feminine paralysis, an 'extension of domestic space' a place of immobility and stasis (Downing 166), but Antonina's retreat to the grounds of Babyon House is, as was Hetty's liminal transition to the outdoors, instrumental to her self-empowerment, a means to escape persecution, and discover a space to control and gain a sense of mental equilibrium and firm resolve. The garden provides cathartic work and she spends all the day weeding out the choking thistles in symbolic preparation for her return to the house for the coming battle with her husband and his spectral ancestresses. Furthermore, in an ironic feminist twist on the homoerotic love triangle of traditional twentieth-century gothic tales, in which women compete for men and 'find not sisterhoods in relationships between women' (Blackford 246), the text emotionally repositions her away from conventional gothic terror of her ghostly rivals to a calm spirit of sympathy and co-operation, a recognition that they are all in the same patriarchal boat. She comes to identify with their frustrated desires and stunted identities in life, how signifying the experience of living women in a patriarchal society, existing 'nowhere, [. . .] never in touch with each other, lost in the air like ghosts' (Irigaray qtd. in Wallace, 'Uncanny Stories' 57), they are disembodied, disconnected, marginalised.

Anne Williams describes female gothic as 'a Looking-Glass World where ancient assumptions about the "male" and the "female" [. . .] are suspended or so transformed as to reveal an entirely different world, exposing the perils lurking in the fathers' corridors of power' (107). Antonina's feminist education is brought about through peering into mirrors to the past, the portraits of the ancestral women that hang in the literal corridor of Babyon Court. On close inspection, they reflect a reality beneath the masks assumed for and painted by men. The text typifies modern feminine gothic which offers a 'site of resistance to [the] concealment of unequal power relations' (Ellis, Kate xvi); Antonina extrapolates the truth of these portraits and they provide her with a figurative gateway into the dead women's world and the means to unearth their subtextual narratives of oppression, and to dismantle the old patriarchs and expose their ruthlessness and fallible tortured souls. She reinterprets her female Babyon nemeses as the real victims, prevented from resting in peace, not by any evil act of their own, but by the sins practised against them by their paterfamilias. Nicholas remembers that his mother, Mary Ann Babyon, 'took a mask off her face' outside of the restraining presence of his tyrannous father (*Lady* 335), and Antonina sees in Mary's eternal false front presented in the painting, her subjection to the same

culturally constructed and socially imposed identity in death. This recalls the portrait of the speaker's dead mother in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 1857 poem, 'Aurora Leigh': a 'male defined mask, [. . .] the dead self that is a male "opus"', which connotes the death of female (creative) identity within patriarchal literary tradition (Gilbert and Gubar 19). Indeed, there is a striking similarity between Aurora's use of literary art (poetry) to reclaim her mother, 'replace the "copy" with the "individuality"' (ibid.), and Antonina's employment of visual art to repaint the Babyon women in order to recover their history, reveal their authentic hidden selves and thus save them from historical oblivion. Furthermore, by using the medium of paint, she does an art version of the revisionary work of feminist gothic fiction, generically committed to 'sketch in the outlines of a female self that is more than the "other" as purely archetypal or stereotypical' (Williams 138). As Nicholas observes, her re-work of his mother's painting is 'better than the thing you took it from. Much more like her' (*Lady* 358).

It has been suggested that in the course of *Rebecca* Mrs de Winter gains from Rebecca a sense of women's potential, and with it an 'understanding of herself and the world about her which has given her strength and self-confidence' to manage Mandalay with the authority she previously lacked (Horner and Zlosnic 119). I would argue, however, that du Maurier's narrator fails to develop the courage to address her anxieties, which are overcome more by changing circumstances rather than her own agency, and she cannot be claimed as a model of modern female empowerment. In the second half of the narrative, she remains in a condition of undeviating idleness and achieves very little beyond challenging Mrs Danvers over the dinner menus. Her feminine vanity is reassured by Maxim's revelation of his hatred of Rebecca and she is unperturbed when it comes to light that he is a wife-murderer. She is powerless to prevent the destruction of Mandalay, cannot be given credit for Maxim's mellowing, and ends an impotent self-exile. Of the gothic tradition, whereby the protagonist's encounter with her female antagonist has perilous ramifications for her identity, Mrs De Winter disappears into Rebecca, the woman she perhaps unconsciously wishes to resemble. By contrast, Antonina's selfhood is strengthened by her positive feminist-identified relationship with her spectral sisters. Furthermore, she bears a strong resemblance to her more pro-active and radical sister-heroines, who 'scheme [. . .] and map [. . .] alternatives to the Father's law' (Williams 140). After befriending and then redefining the Babyon women, she restores Nicholas' disturbed emotional equilibrium, brings spiritual harmony to the house and ends the cycle of oppression started by his ancestral patriarchal family, effecting a permanent change in gender power relations through gaining control over him and so her own life. Improving on Laura's achievements, which are curtailed with the abnegation of her painting career, her own art-work becomes intrinsic to a re-evaluation of identity. One

of the portraits she refers to as 'less a painting than a map of her own heart', and she reflects on how she 'gained knowledge of herself and control of her own spirit as she painted', that she 'had fought battles and won them, [. . .] lost her fear of the gallery' and had become 'grown up and old at last' (*Lady* 357). According to an images-of-women, liberal feminist critical reading that finds evidence of feminist politics in strong female protagonists, *Lady Babyon* can be situated at the radical end of the female gothic continuum, the place where 'women's continuing need for definition through others' (Blackford 245) is surpassed and the resolution 'enlarges [the heroine's] world, opens up the possibility of discovering good, and of finding what she seeks' (Williams 145). Dane's gothic/ghost hybrid maps Antonina's maturation and her triumphs which far exceed those of du Maurier's heroine.

The classic female gothic text 'defies male power and thus makes it available for contestation, [and] ends with a woman in possession of a previously contested castle' (Ellis, Kate 221). Despite its feminist credentials, however, it tends to depend upon a patriarchal model of ultimate heterosexual romantic fulfilment. Ironically, Williams sees no problem with a feminist form forging the positive identities of its heroines through marriage, creating 'a rebirth' in which she is:

awakened to a world in which love is not only possible but available; she acquires in marriage a new name and [. . .] a new identity. Indeed, she is often almost literally reborn, rescued at the climax from the life-threatening danger of being locked up, walled in, or otherwise made to disappear from the world.

(103-4)

Her analysis is certainly pertinent to *Rebecca*, which follows *Jane Eyre*'s narrative trajectory towards marital tranquillity, yet although heroines of both these texts arguably gain a measure of autonomy as a consequence of their husband's disempowerment, by ending Jane's journey in marriage Charlotte Brontë was unable 'consciously to define the full meaning of achieved freedom' (Gilbert and Gubar 69) and the second Mrs de Winter's sense of completion is similarly contingent upon the resumption of Maxim's love and his assurances that he had never loved Rebecca. Both texts are thus confined within a framework of conventional romance. Conversely, *Lady Babyon* vigorously counters the ideological vein of popular gothic, eschewing the romantic resolution, aligning more with perspective of the modern feminist-inflected ghost story, 'critical of the romantic formula and its celebration of heterosexual love and marriage' (Moody 77). It rejects the generic gothic outcome, whereby the heroine awakes from a gothic nightmare to realise that she has mistakenly read her circumstances as supernaturally controlled and that in reality 'the master loves her and her alone' (Williams 101). While Mrs de Winter and

Antonina are both agonised that their husbands regret marrying them, Mrs De Winter's suspicions are unfounded and Antonina's are not. She renegotiates her status in a marriage which becomes reasonably companionable, but it is not a romantic triumph; the romantic and sexual satisfactions of conventional narratives are discarded for the alternative fulfilments of the fully liberated woman, which require Nicholas' ultimate expulsion from the plot. He is fatally injured in a riding accident towards the end of the novel, a palpable punishment for the crimes against women perpetuated by his forebears, and as he clings to life in his last few days, Antonina realises that 'if Nicholas died, [she would] still have her happiness' (*Lady* 375). Granted, her supernatural experiences and metaphysical imagination have effectively defeated her fear of death, so that in her full expectation of reunion with her husband in the after-life, widowhood is not a tragedy. Yet, the 'peace and quiet – there was peace at Babyon' (378), comes as much from having been liberated from patriarchal control as from having exorcised the ghosts. 'Glad that there was no picture of Nicholas. It was better to have him safe in her own mind' (*ibid.*), she appears relieved that masculine will is at last contained. Deliverance is political as well as personal. Dying without issue, Nicholas is the 'last master of an ancient house' (299) and the termination of the aristocratic patriarchal lineage is a gothic feminist triumph which sees a middle-class woman become the victor and heir. Gender-politically, the novel has come a long way from *Regiment of Women's* unconvincing fairy tale plot of conjugal bliss; it deconstructs normative heterosexuality by completely fracturing the premise of the conventional love triangle in a widening conception of love. Uncertain whether Nicholas' dying endearment, 'dearest' (378) is meant for her or his ghost-mother, Antonina muses 'what does it matter? I love you both' (*ibid.*), signifying her androgynous affections which encompass Mary Anne. Her final reward is celibacy, and her failings as a wife and inability to birth a child are more than compensated for by the true contentment of peaceful independent widowhood and a modern life characterised by art, solitude and confident self-definition. At the end of her journey which sees her rectification of the misogynist abuses of the past and the establishment of autonomous living, she attains an even fuller humanity by transforming Babyon Court into a military hospital when the First World War breaks out, establishing an alternative domestic scenario, an interfusion of private and public roles and spaces. *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca* reject the permanent validity of women's work, 'rescuing' their heroines from their roles in teaching and service in order that they can properly attend to the needs of their husbands and theirs are not the castles of feminist gothic, which must be restored by 'women's activity, not only within its walls but outside in the world as well' (Ellis, Kate xvi: my italics). Conversely, the female redemptions occurring at Babyon Court situate Dane's novel more firmly within a feminist literary tradition. The text does equivocate however, retreating from a full

affirmation of woman's fulfilment by failing to imagine an emancipated future in life for Antonia, who, the reader is told, is to die not long after the novel closes from 'influenza and over-work' as a result of the war (*Lady* 377). Furthermore, as a military nurse, her role, like Mary Pawle's, is ultimately a nurturing one, possibly intended to appeal to a female readership sympathising with demobilised shell-shocked First-World-War combatants and experiencing that war-generated female guilt which so complicated and reconfigured feminism in the 1920s. Defining Antonina within a limited vocational framework somewhat restricts the impact of the text's contestation of domestic ideology and perhaps comes dangerously close to reconfirming the institutional order. Yet this is not necessarily a conservative manoeuvre; Antonina's premature death and nurturing role truthfully reflect the historical reality of the war and the devastating outbreak of influenza in its aftermath.

In Dane's fantastical texts, any outward compliance to a conservative hegemonic position is superseded by radical elements: Hetty's dominance in her marriage, the reconfiguration of the madwoman as a victim of patriarchy in Hariot's story, Mary and Antonina's fulfilment without men, and the implied supremacy of women's visionary experience. While criticisms of normative gender ideology are limited in *Rebecca* and 'The Villa Désirée', both of which work to support conservative definitions of femininity, Dane's texts challenge her peers' conceptions of ideal womanhood. Drawing on models afforded by literature of estrangement writing and feminist gothic and ghost stories, they open up narrative time and space to reveal hidden patriarchal histories, reclaim lost female heritages and imagine utopian and supernatural spaces where women can evade the oppressions of the repressive cultural order, forego or escape the shackles of matrimony, access the semiotic and transform the symbolic. It is quite appropriate, in fact, to rank Dane's fantastical work alongside *Lolly Willowes*, more renowned for its feminist innovations. Despite what might be Dane's appeasement of the conservative middle-brow market and concern to maintain an ideological balancing act, her methods are comparable to Townsend Warner's utilisation of the fantastic to contest established gender roles, relations and power, and to validate alternative realities to those mapped out in the symbolic. Indeed, while *Lolly Willowes* is actually grounded in the material world, Dane's heroines are all explicitly emboldened by authentic magical and spectral envisioning and their psycho-spiritual sentience is central to her concept of women's exceptional powers.

Family Chronicles: Women's Journeys from Domestication to Professionalism

The second and third volumes of *The Babyons* – namely *Midsummer Men* and *Creeping Jenny* – and *Broome Stages* are realist chronicles that

inject feminist perspectives into this traditionally patriarchal genre popularised in 1922 by John Galsworthy in *The Forsyte Saga* and by Hugh Walpole in his 1930 to 1933 heritor novels, *The Herries Chronicles*. *The Forsyte Saga* is a broadly liberal critique of Victorian patriarchy which upholds the imagination and love of art and beauty of main protagonists, Jolyon Forsyte and his sister-in-law, Irene Forsyte, against family financial and business acumen, epitomised by Jolyon's cousin and Irene's husband, Soames Forsyte. The novel questions the sanctity of marriage, champions divorce and tolerates unmarried sexual relationships. Categorically middlebrow, which was a medium for men as well as women writers (Humble 4), its readership was predominantly female, yet women's points of view and inner lives are conspicuously absent from the narrative. Irene, the heroine, idealised for her qualities of beauty, passivity and vulnerability, is viewed through a male gaze, objectified for the satisfactions of author and various male characters in the text. June Forsyte, her spinster cousin and feisty independent antithesis, is depicted as unattractively eccentric. Guided by E.M. Forster's credo, 'only connect [. . .] the prose and the passion', which manifestly informs the text (Forster. Epigraph. Walpole, *Herries* 762), *The Herries Chronicles* replicates Galsworthy's dichotomy between the sensitive, imaginative and bohemian branch of a family and its propertied, stolid, more reactionary members, but is primarily entrenched in anxieties about power sharing, empathising with the upper-middle class Herries family's fears of Chartism and the General strike and ultimately upholding bourgeois values. A conventional and sentimental popular romance replete with idealised love-matches, it self-consciously identifies with and is influenced by twentieth-century male literary tradition: Thomas Hardy's philosophic veneration of nature,¹⁴ and D. H. Lawrence's now infamous glorification of phallocentric sexual mastery. Indeed, Like Forsyte and other male exponents of the chronicle genre, whose construction of Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian female protagonists is inevitably conventional, Walpole pays lip service to women's independence. Vanessa, the heroine, is a paragon of womanliness, 'kind and generous and simple-hearted' (306), masochistically loyal to her husband, Ellis Herries, despite the fact that he schemes to have her certified and subjects her to rape and attempted murder. Dependent upon her lover, Benji Herries, to rescue her from her violent marriage, like Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles, the narrative forgives her fallen status on account of her self-abnegating femininity; she desires to devote herself to Benji, 'to care for him, understand him, comfort him, make him happy' (629). Their relationship is logocentric and Lawrentian; Benji's essentially polygamy and her natural monogamy are highly idealised. She believes that 'women are faithful [. . .] it's the thing they like best to be!' (841), and 'being a woman and therefore having all her eggs in one basket (which was Benjie), Benjie could satisfy her wildest longings'. She knows that 'she could not satisfy Benjie. Nor did she try.' Submissively,

‘when this restlessness came upon him, she let him go free’ (807) and neither her phallic worship, her tolerance of his infidelity and frequent absences, nor his irritation with her tendency to nag and bore him, are exposed to narrative interrogation. She responds to New Women writings with ambivalent feelings of envy, antipathy and a self-satisfied consciousness of the superiority of her own oppositional feminine dullness: ‘they were depressing stories’, she reflects:

very feminist. Men figured as poor creatures, mean, faithless and greedy. But oh! What cleverness! What observation! [. . .] Vanessa knew, as she read, that one thing that was the matter with herself was that she was not clever at all. [. . .] She could not remember that she had ever said a brilliant thing in her life.

(767)

Here, ‘but oh!’ suggests that she respects the authors’ creativity in spite of, rather than because of, their feminist representations of men, which she considers false and unkind, and her outlook unifies the central narrative perspective which condones her idealisation of Benji, her wholesome womanliness and her distrust of feminist ‘cleverness’, her self-recriminations and her martyring return to her husband when he suffers a breakdown. Her daughter is only ostensibly more modern. Following in her mother’s womanly footsteps, she ultimately reneges on her initially more feminist outlook, relinquishing her ambitions in order to care for and encourage her war-blinded peace-activist husband, gradually reducing her contribution towards his work in the internationalist sphere to a minimum, and only mixing with other internationalists under his jurisdiction.

Dane’s realist sagas transcend the patriarchal ideology inscribed by Galsworthy and Walpole, continuing in her characteristic narrative vein, sanctioning female rebellions against the misogynistic *patres familias*. In the modern period, the preoccupation of the feminine middlebrow with wealthy families became a fascination; its attention turned to doomed aristocratic dynasties and old-fashioned families, despite or perhaps because of their ‘dramatic unlikeness to the conventional nuclear family that was becoming increasingly normative’ (Humble 150). Aware that their social superiors were becoming a rarity, destined to go the way of the dodo, sagas engaged their middle-class readership in an intense, voyeuristic and perhaps nostalgic relationship with the English ruling elite, and fictional eccentric and highly strung titled old families began to occupy central narrative positions. In *The Babyons* and *Broome Stages*, Dane exploits the zeitgeist’s preoccupations with aristocratic extraordinariness, securing a wide readership while simultaneously smuggling sub-textual feminist agendas into the narratives. Whereas eccentric families in inter-war literature generally ‘elicit in their readers a compelling

combination of fantasy-identification and repugnance' (ibid.), Dane's audience is manipulated to separate out these responses in gender-specific ways: to react negatively to the patriarchs and empathetically to their female counterparts. Furthermore, while primogeniture is a staple theme of both male and female-authored inter-war sagas, the injustices of patrilineal inheritance is the specific focus of Dane's chronicles, dramatised through men dispossessing women and women empowered by mothers and ancestresses to regain their lost inheritance.

In *The Babyons* the aristocracy is not romanticised but condemned as an institution of patriarchal oppression, and the novel depicts the ascendancy of female power over outlived and defunct male aristocrats, augmented in each generation and culminating in the welcome extinction of the blood-line and shift of power to Antonina, whose origins are middle-class. *Midsummer Men*, the Georgian fable which succeeds *Third Person Singular*, centres on Menella's unorthodox decision to bequeath the family wealth, inherited from Jamie, to her daughter, Isabella, and on her son Ludovic's attempts to control and ultimately dispossess his sister. Calculating that by marrying Isabella into the affluent local gentry he can persuade his mother to change her will in his favour on the grounds that her daughter will no longer require an independent income, he encourages the suit of humourless and chilling neighbouring aristocrat, Sir Hervey Ypres. There are two other contenders for Isabella's hand, however, both less socially respectable; one is a local gypsy and the other, a Jewish businessman, wealthy but nevertheless widely despised. *Midsummer Men* dramatises a dual cultural apartheid operating against Jews, who were superficially integrated into society, and gypsies, who remained completely outside. Vehemently opposing a gypsy settlement in the locality, Ludovic insults what he sees as a collection of 'tramps and vagabonds!', in streams of furious invective, and determines to use his powers to have them evicted, declaring: 'I'm on the bench. I'll not have it - ' (*Midsummer* 95). Augmenting this sense of affront to his notions of English cultural tradition, romantic encroachments towards Isabella made by Ralph Samuels, or the 'stinking, greasy Jew' as he calls him (102), constitute in his mind a contaminating threat to his blood-line. As social outcasts, gypsies and Jews 'were frequently paired' in literature 'throughout the nineteenth century and beyond' in order to romanticise their diasporic dissimilarity to normative cultural groups (Nord 5); this afforded the subaltern a measure of sympathetic treatment, particularly in works by modernist writers including D.H. Lawrence, whose contemporaneous novella, *The Virgin and the Gipsy* (1930), 'expose[s] the atrophy of England's ostensibly superior native racial stock' and privileges 'the potent energy of a nomadic people [as] important in the English land' (Kramp 64). Other writers making tolerant representations of gypsy and Jewish communities, who were more likely to have influenced *The Babyons* are George Eliot, and Sir Walter Scott, a writer Dane

particularly admired, whose 1815 novel, *Guy Mannering*, features sympathetic central gypsy-figure, Meg Merrilies. Dane's narrative endorses both gypsy and Jew as valid competitors for Isabella's hand but as the suitor who represents the power of the normative centre, Sir Hervey is cast as the villain who pushes a loveless marriage on Isabella based on economic exchange. Having squandered a fortune made in the manufacturing industry, he proposes to endow her with 'an establishment' (*Midsummer* 134), in return for her promised inheritance.

Recalling Jenny Summers' symbolic allegiance to the one surviving painting of Madala in *Legend*, Isabella well grasps the matrilineal significance of her aunt Hariot's portrait, which she lovingly preserves and hangs in her bedchamber, and which inspires her to circumvent her ancestress's miserable fate and escape male persecution, as a century later it galvanises Antonina to reclaim female Babyon history. Identifying with her wild descendent, she also adopts her banner of statement black and red clothing, but although she too is 'a mad-woman', she finds herself 'rejoicing in the strength that madness lent her' (159). Crossing the threshold of Babyon House by night, the surrounding woodlands provide Isabella with semiotic space, paralleling the midnight garden which empowers Hetty. The outdoor world is here the locus, not of magic, but of the gypsy community, whose pagan knowledge and rural lore 'imagined as long-standing features of English rural life' in British literary traditions (Nord 4) tempt Isabella to usurp patriarchal law. The gypsies engage her in a primeval ritual which entails planting three orpine roots in the forest, naming them after her three suitors, and waiting until Midsummer-night for one of them to come and claim her for his bride. Feeling at liberty in the marginal space of the woods, she then discards, as delimiting, this method of procuring a husband; folk-wisdom melds with her own rebelliousness to give her a sense of self-belief and the confidence to reject Sir Hervey and her brother's Machiavellian plans for her inheritance, paving the way for her betrothal to Samuels, her own choice of suitor. Dane challenges normative literary ideological conventions by which 'seldom [. . .] are Jewish characters romanticised or idealised' (6) in her depiction of Samuels as a sensitive man, enamoured by the Devon landscape, caught between intellectual secularity and loyalty to his lost people and traditions. He proffers a gentle romantic style of courtship, and by creating a similitude between the lovers' experience of marginalisation, the narrative perspective rebuts Ludovic's patriarchal racism. Isabella overcomes ingrained prejudices which initially make her wonder 'was a Jew a man?' (*Midsummer* 112); during their courtship she is won over by Samuel's decency and integrity and begins to recognise his affinity with her and their shared sense of alienation. Both are cursed – he as a Jew and she as a rebellious unwomanly female prone to unfeminine outbursts of anger – and 'like fellow countrymen, wanderers met by chance in a foreign city' (128) they both encounter 'closed doors' (126) and

worship 'strange gods' (128). By the prescribed Midsummer hour when superstition dictates that Isabella's future husband will be revealed, two of the orpine roots have withered, portending Samuels' eradication from the contest, and in an allegorical enactment of patriarchal power and female resistance, Ludovic storms the feminine forest, kills Samuels, and is fatally stabbed by his vengeful sister. Completely freed now from cultural bondage, she settles on marrying the gypsy, who she had originally considered accepting 'as a banner of defiance' (99). Offering sexual fulfilment, narrative treatment of his relationship with Isabella anticipates the moral elevation of Yvette's sexual partnership with her gypsy in *The Virgin and the Gypsy*, which, published a year after *The Babyons*, similarly suggested an alternative to the stultifications of the soul-destroying normative family, 'a glimpse of a nomadic existence based upon mobility and sensual desire' (Kamp 64). Socially conditioned to fear illicit sexual passion as the route to madness and the death of the soul, Isabella is caught between desire for and terror of physical intimacy, symbolised by the phallic potency of the remaining orpine root, 'stiff and upright' (*Midsummer* 116), representing the gypsy lover, which towers above the 'half-grown stem flaccid and dull' which signifies Hervey's impotence. Her union with the gypsy is a pleasant relief and feeling 'that she had known him all her life' (117), her sexual fears are completely overcome. Furthermore, unlike Yvette, Isabella gains a position in the gypsy community which is not defined by a clinging sexual subordination; she becomes its presiding matriarch, identity-secured in the deep feminised space of the woods.

Isabella's absconson means the family fortune passes along the male line to Ludovic's son, Henry, but female primogeniture is restored by the next generation of Babyon women in the sequel volume, *Creeping Jenny*, in which Isabella's daughter, Teresa, who succeeds her as a single and so even more powerful ruler of the gypsy dominion, reinstates her mother's lost Babyon heritage. In Teresa, the familiar female literary gypsy figure originally inaugurated in Meg Merrilies becomes the subject of a feminist reconfiguration. Like Meg, Teresa works from the margins of the gypsy camp to infiltrate normative society. She becomes the mistress of Robert Thistledallow, owner of River Hayes estate, bearing him a daughter, Mary Anne, and troubling his patrician plan to discard her and their illegitimate child and dispatch them to the gypsies, by leaving him with the baby instead. This plot device achieves additional feminist goals, reversing the common literary stereotype of the female gypsy child abductor, and countering 'fantasies of heterosexual male longing' in traditional novels which sexualise the female gypsy figure (Nord 12). Hence, Teresa humiliates Robert, sticking his 'pride full of pins' (*Creeping* 170), arousing in him not desire but a deferential fear. Nord counts *Guy Mannerling* as one of a cluster of progressive gypsy-centred novels which 'chafed against patterns of gender conformity [with] gypsy characters

who deviated from conventional forms of masculinity and femininity' (Nord 12), yet although Merrilies is an archetypal 'androgynous – or masculinised – female gypsy' (14), ultimately she functions to restore male primogeniture and re-establish the status quo, guarding a boy child from the margins of the gypsy community, intervening to restore his title and family inheritance, and sacrificing her life for the patriarchal good in the process. In *Creeping Jenny*, on the other hand, Teresa is pivotal to a story of a specifically female heritage and empowerment, returning to the patriarchal estate to rescue her grown daughter. Under Robert's roof, Mary Anne is oppressed, regarded as her father's 'property' and 'something of his own to have in the house to serve him when he was old' (*Creeping* 170–2), and also shunned by his family on account of her illegitimacy. Accustomed from an early age to adopt a creeping manner appropriate to her subservient position, in the course of the narrative she embarks on the habitual tripartite journey of Dane's rites of passage narratives. Her transition commences with her detachment from the persecutory environment of the house, whereby wandering to the edge of the estate 'she put off her habit of restraint as a runaway nun might put off her convent serge' (223). Separation from the paterfamilias always comes with risks and challenges, however, and her boundary crossing unhappily lands her in Babyon territory, and into the arms of its current patriarchal custodian, Ludovic's grandson, Charles, and the fate which Isabella escaped. Not the shepherd lover of pastoral literature that she has dreamed of, Charles engages her in a relationship in which romance is underscored with a feminist discourse on female primogeniture. Similar to Sir Hervey's, his lavish lifestyle and mounting debts galvanise a marital ambition to secure a wealthy heiress to bail him out and she jumps out of the frying pan of paternal control not only into the fire of marital submission and indifference but into the flames of disinheritance, whereby her 'dowry was in her husband's control: she had no alternative to obedient service' (250). The next stage in the liminal process is anticipated in the title of the novel and in its prefacing adage: 'Man is the oak, woman the ivy tree' (n.p.). 'Creeping Jenny' implies a species of ivy, symbolic of Mary Anne's creeping movements and vine-like clinging onto to her romantic hopes of Charles, but the proverb's assumption that a marriage model based on female weakness and dependency and masculine strength and dominance is a good one is heavily contested and moreover ironised in the novel. During their first meeting Charles rips nervously at the ivy because 'it kills the trees. It clambers over them and sucks them' and 'a trail like that [. . .] can kill a young oak in twenty years,' and Mary Anne's reply, uttered 'oddly' that, 'ivy has to live too. It must hold on to something' (*Creeping* 234), indicates the paradoxical strength and survivalism of the dependent ivy. A revisionary, more feminist interpretation of the old maxim is thus proposed, and just as the weakness of the ivy belies its ability to destroy the host tree, Mary Anne's timidity masks a

hidden capability. Their conversation here anticipates the eventual reversal of power in their relationship, initiated by Teresa's sudden reappearance from the woods to enlighten her daughter that Charles 'rules you and drives you, [. . .] and you can't get free of his rules' (255), to help her to find the courage to combat his abuses and establish a mother-daughter partnership whereby they usurp his power and run the estate themselves. Thus, while more normative texts, such as *Guy Mannering*, enact literary fantasies of gypsies assisting gentrified male protagonists to 'escape from the bonds of obedience and conformity' (Nord 12), ultimately only to return them to the family as new patriarchal successors, Dane's female gypsy ironically transposes Meg's narrative role to permanently infiltrate the masculinist power-base and transfer it to deserving women. With a similitude to *Spinsters' Rests'* Mother Holle, Teresa is the feminist-identified recovered figure of the lost mother, simultaneously marginalised and empowering. As she moves in on the centre and teams up with Mary Anne to create a successful agricultural business, Charles is metaphorically strangled: a dissipated and powerless 'ruined oak' (*Creeping* 261), he becomes Mary Anne's 'pensioner' with an 'income lessoned' (257). This is the third liminal stage, re-assimilation, whereby Mary Anne repossesses her home and presides over a re-configured female commercial and economic estate space. Thus, matrilineal lineage is reinstated, maternal genealogy reconstructed and the Babyon fortune restored for the women to enjoy and ultimately for Antonina to inherit. In the gothic volumes of *The Babyons*, ghosts, like Hariot's surviving portrait, symbolise women's refusal to be ignored and eradicated, haunting *Third Person Singular* and *Lady Babyon* as reminders of patriarchal power and abuses. Once Antonina has found the mental fortitude to put her house in order as well as in the saga's realist volumes, they lie dormant. This is because they are not required; Isabella is strengthened by the portrait of Hariot and Mary Anne is supported by the power of her living mother. Thus, women's stories throughout *The Babyons* are kept alive by means of portraits, spectral reappearances and inter-generational communication between living female kin.

While *The Babyons* was one of a number of inter-war sagas which 'hybridised, and cross-fertilis[ed] with romance, fantasy, [and] the gothic' (Wallace, *Woman's* 3), Dane's second family chronicle, *Broome Stages*, is entirely grounded in empirical reality. The novel was 'acclaimed by the critics' (St John 225):¹⁵ the columnist for the *Times Literary Supplement* called it 'an unusual and charming book, told [. . .] with an unfailing spirit, a keen wit and an unusual gift for language' ('Broome Stages' 580), and according to Barrow, it was to 'prove the most popular of all her novels, finding a new readership in every subsequent generation' (Barrow 62). A best-seller on both sides of the Atlantic, in Britain 'it went into fifth edition before publication day and ran into twenty-two thousand copies three months later' (Oakland Tribune Sept 4, 1932). In

order to contribute her vast knowledge of theatre history to a growing inter-war initiative to 're-write history from a point of view that centralises women's concerns' (Wallace, *Woman's* ix5), Dane wove elements of the theatre novel, a genre established by Dickens and adopted by middlebrow writers including Ngaio Marsh, into its family-saga fabric. The text utilises the theatre context to intrinsically fulfil a feminist rhetorical purpose, celebrating the world of the stage as a locus for female employment, creativity and professionalism, and as a place for male homosexual fulfilment, where gender boundaries are more fluid than in society as a whole. Originally planned as a novel about English political history, specifically the Norman and Angevin royal succession, Richard Addinsell, who collaborated with Dane on her musical plays, suggested that since this topic was not currently in vogue, she should write instead about the lives of several generations of a fictional theatrical family (Barrow 62). Vestiges of political history remain however, analogised in the Broome family genealogy, which loosely resembles the Plantagenet royal line.¹⁶ The narrative opens in the seventeenth century, but principally dramatises the career of eighteenth-century actor, William Broome, named after William, Duke of Normandy, and his descendants, closing on the twentieth-century experiences of thespians, John, and Richard Broome, whose overwhelming success as a film star in Hollywood is nebulously paralleled with Richard the First's conquest of an equivalent destination for medieval fortune-hunters, analogously named the Holy Land.

Despite the references to masculine heritage, *Broome Stages* is predominantly a novel about women, and rejecting the country-house saga formula which instates protagonists from the ranks of the idle rich, Dane develops a narrative conversation around women living and working in non-domestic territory, the urban context of the London metropolitan theatre, unfamiliar terrain for the middlebrow. Of the same pattern as *The Babyons*, in which Georgian women, Hariot, Menella and Isabella, live outside of the public domain and Victorian and modern descendants, Mary Anne and Antonina enter the professional sphere, respectively availing themselves of nineteenth-century opportunities for business and farming work and First-World-War generated nursing contexts, *Broome Stages* also configures women extending their working role and influence with each generation. The theatre provided Dane with a golden opportunity to dramatisate women more fully immersed in the public sphere than was the norm, to make a saga-focussed analysis of gender and historical change by charting the transformation of gendered values and behaviour over the two-hundred-year time span of the novel. The novel bears witness to women's increasing integration into the business of the stage as thespians and managers, to their achievements and hard-earned economic prosperity. It was not uncommon for women's inter-war sagas to follow generations of a family 'often connected to a specific trade or occupation' (Wallace, *Woman's* 64): Daphne Du Maurier's focus on the

fortunes of the Coombe family boat-building business in *The Loving Spirit* is one example. *Broome Stages* is unusual, however, in the fundamental importance of work to the lives of the female protagonists, the central position which they come to hold in the family business and, with each new generation, their greater adaptability to change than their male counterparts. Dane establishes a sense of feminist historical progression as with each succeeding generation, women increasingly defy their patriarchal controllers, and reconfigure stage, back-stage and office spaces under female governance. They become actor-managers, actresses and theatre owners and for the last woman in the family dynasty, Elinor Broome, the theatre becomes an alternative domestic environment, under her jurisdiction. Women become gradually less dependent on inherited wealth and more invulnerable to the machinations of a system that seeks to disinherit them. Dane's model matches paradigms pioneered by better known feminist writers, Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf, who show modern independent women enjoying London life, 'rejecting men as partners and turning away from claustrophobic patriarchal demands to find recompense in the social, professional, and vocational opportunities of the city' (Parsons 147). Indeed, differentiating from the majority of inter-war middlebrow novels, whose protagonists forsake the urban freedoms that some of their fictional fin-de-siècle counterparts had forged in favour of 'escape attempted into arms of men they become dependent on' (ibid.), *Broome Stages* holds firm to a feminist identity. Comparable to *The Forsyte Saga* and *The Herries Chronicles* in its admiration of affluent characters with imaginative, principally artistic sensibilities, Dane's chronicle is distinguished by an unusual preoccupation with work ethic. The family are defined by their hardworking pursuit of goals, their genetic workaholicism, what Stephen Broome calls the 'devil in us [. . .] that has to be given work' (Broome 368), and Lettice Broome describes as an impetus to 'do everything to excess' (476). Dane offers a meritocratic perspective which mistrusts the aristocracy, romanticises the proletarian and itinerant origins of the Broome dynasty as it did the wandering gypsies and Jews in *Midsummer Men*, celebrates the middle-class work ethic which generates Broome social mobility, and identifies predominantly with Elinor, the middle-class outsider. The first Broome, Richard, is an imaginative boy from an ordinary family who joins a group of strolling players and makes his fortune through his acting talents, and the family only become gentrified when his daughter marries into the aristocratic Wybird dynasty. The aristocracy are ailing and negatively associated, as they are in *The Babyons*, with patriarchal structures, disease, decadence, and a genetic strain which taints the brilliant and creative peasant bloodline and creates the congenital family curse of depressive melancholia, self-destructiveness and, among the family's men, suicide.

The radicalism of the novel's class politics is somewhat limited, however. Its inherently middlebrow middle-class identity generates a focus on

bourgeois stage culture and privileged wealthy wo-managers¹⁷ from an established theatre family and it perhaps fails to accurately reflect socio-economic realities for poorer women working on the chauvinistic Victorian and early twentieth-century stage, where 'economic subjection was institutionalised [. . .] limiting the exercise of talent and the development of potential in a career that only seemed on the surface to offer a liberating escape from the gender inequities of Victorian life beyond the footlights' (Powell 158–9), the 'casting of the female roles was [. . .] subject to the control of the managers' (Hollidge 22) and 'sexual attractiveness to men was almost essential to success' (Powell 64). No reference is made to Shaw's pro-feminist socialist theatre, despite the fact that Dane and Shaw were kindred spirits of sorts and like Dane, Shaw 'used his plays as a platform to attack the marriage laws' (Hollidge 31). Moreover, none of the Broome heroines belong to the Actresses Franchise League, even though prior to and during the First World War, this was an organisation which 'nearly every actress in the business joined' (Hollidge, qtd. in Gale, *West* 57). The absence of socialist theatre as a point of reference is perhaps a consequence of Dane's appeasement to her middlebrow readership or her possibly poor memory of the conditions of theatrical production beyond the West End; once a struggling actress, by the publication of *Broome Stages*, she was one of the only three playwrights (the others being Dodie Smith and A.A. Milne), whose success meant they had no need to raise their heads above the parapet of 'timid and reactionary commercial theatre' (Marshall qtd. in Gale, *West* 47).

Yet, in her earlier (1924) text, *Wandering Stars*, which also centres on gender and creative provenance in the theatre and 'crafted together elements of her own experience as an actress and as a dramatist' (Barrow 128), the material privations which Dane suffered as an aspiring thespian on the London stage are more fully acknowledged. The plot of the fictitious play centred upon in the narrative is an enacted version of Dane's novella 'The Lover', which appeared in the same publication as *Wandering Stars*. The narrative comprises the conversation about famed star of stage and screen, Damaris Payne, between two of her former male acquaintances, eminent playwright, George Hart, and Cairns. As the two men reminisce, Cairns recalls how in her early youth she was 'cuckooed out to type her way through life' by her antagonistic step mother (*Wandering* 124), and moved to 'the cheapest home from home in London' (ibid.), before resigning her secretarial post and trying her luck on the stage, gaining employment on account of 'eyes and her figure' (*Wandering* 124) more than her completely overlooked exceptional imaginative powers and extensive knowledge of Shakespeare. Maddened by the nonexistence of plays about 'how a woman feels, a real woman' (146), she constructs her own, and lacking masculine authority, persuades Hart, as yet largely unknown, and with whom she is in love, to prepare the script and secure performance rights. Dane exposes the exploitation of women by dramatising Hart's

Machiavellian machinations. Although Damaris is the play's principal architect, he takes the credit, and during their working partnership, they become 'a doubled creature, the east and west of one sky, birth in her eyes and a sun coming up, and in his [. . .] a reflection of her glory, a false dawn' (139). Hart admits to Cairns that he had 'no scruples in exploiting' her imaginative powers to perpetuate his career, in appropriating the 'pearls and diamonds that sprang from her mouth', the 'ideas [that] showered from her' (138, 104) and in then abandoning her in London and taking the play to New York, where he 'made a fortune out of it; or rather, Damaris made one for him' (123). Cairns contends that following Hart's romantic and professional betrayal, as she worked her way up to become an illustrious actress, she underwent a process of moral deterioration, a transformation from rising, shining creative force with fixed sphere and purpose, to fallen angel, the 'wandering star' of despair, for whom, in the biblical words of Jude, it 'is reserved/the blackness of darkness forever' (Epigraph. *Wandering Stars* n.p). Taking as his point of reference the hardening of her attitude towards men and emerging disregard for sexual purity on her road to 'star'dom, his main complaint is her changed manner towards him, how, during a recent meeting between them after many years apart, 'there was nothing lacking save, as I remembered now that I missed it so, the former beautiful crimson in her cheeks as she welcomed me: and in her eyes – nothing, nothing left of me' (241). From a feminist critical perspective, he is an unreliable narrator, mistakenly reading her rejection of his romantic gestures as evidence of the death of her soul, when in reality she has no romantic interest in him and his indictment of her stems from the fact that her wealth and power mean any hopes he had of possessing her are lost. Lamenting her fall from his control and masculine ideal of female conduct, her transfiguration into a laughing medusa figure and her sardonic and subversive sense of humour acquired over the course of her career arouses his particular hostility, and he calls it 'monstrous that she should speak and move about the earth still – and laugh' (ibid.). The subtextual message suggests that her demonical attitude has been the means of her survival and prosperity, however, and a warning to men is implied in her mocking rejection of feminine obligations and performances and her sense of pleasure in her androgyny and economic power. Indeed, 'wandering' and 'star' could indicate feminist completion: her rise to professional fame has endowed her with freedom of movement and the liminal mechanisms to transcend spacial and cultural restrictions. As an actress, she is able to re-embrace the itinerant lifestyle of the strolling player, the nomadic-style existence embraced by the *Babyon* gypsy-women.

Dane's recognition of class and gender inequality in *Wandering Stars* is perhaps compromised by the text's individualistic message that poverty is surmountable through the right mix of creativity and ambition, yet Damaris's autonomy, consistent with Dane's other ambitious fictional

actresses from across the class spectrum, is not necessarily a distortion of reality. As an industry arguably ahead of its time, positions for women were more available in the theatre than in most other vocational areas (Davis 305), the nineteenth and early-twentieth-century actress was to some extent 'freed and empowered by her life on the stage' (4), and 'might transcend a fixed domestic identity, cultivating "myriad lives" and exercising a power and independence thought incompatible with wives and mothers' (Powell 27). In a meeting of The Women's Freedom League, Margaret Webster, who was present when the actors' trades union, Equity, was inaugurated at the house of her mother, actress May Whitty, applauds the twelve women on its council of management and claims that the theatre 'was the first of profession in which women had got a footing and in which they had obtained equality of opportunity and achievement with men. It is still the profession in which women hold pride of place in positions of eminence and responsibility' (*The Vote* June 30 1933). In 1859, an anonymous writer for the *Englishwoman's Journal* acknowledged the achievements of actresses: 'the way in which they have had to grapple with real, hard facts, to think and work and depend upon themselves' (qtd. in Powell 6), and Dane makes the same point in 'Acting in Schools', a chapter in *The Women's Side* which connects her own school performances with liminality and self-actualisation. 'We rejoiced subconsciously', she declares, 'in the sense it gave us of freedom, agility and power' (85).

Broome Stages follows the feminist narrative trajectory of *Wandering Stars* and Dane's other post-First-World-War oeuvre in which exceptional women ultimately reject romantic ideals and the inertia of traditional domesticity to embrace professionalisation. Her conception of women's innate superiority does not preclude an understanding of the power of social constructiveness however, and in the manner of other modern female-authored sagas, which suggest that 'gender [. . .] is historically contingent rather than essential' (Wallace, *Woman's* 8), her female characters are conditioned by changing family and national cultural ideologies. Involved in personal struggles against the tyranny of the patriarchal family, the extent to which they are able to form androgynous identities and the kind of identity which they assume, depends foremost on their historical context. The first Broome women are products of their Georgian acculturation. William (Dick) Broome's daughter, Hilaret, is the first female member of the family to get work on the stage but this ends with her marriage. When her daughter, Lettice, marries an actor cousin, William Broome, and she enters the profession too, accompanying him on his provincial tours to manage his career, pregnancy and motherhood oblige her to return to the restrictions of home, from where she continues to work in an administrative role and while William enjoys a meteoric rise to fame, she is left stranded indoors, depressed and 'torn between the wish to accompany [her husband] and the knowledge that

her children and her settled order of life held her fast' (*Broome* 73). William now begins an affair with his lead actress and his contact with Lettice becomes limited to fleeting visits to their London home primarily to see his sons, which exacerbates her sense of pinioned stasis and feelings of feminine ineptitude. After one of his calls, 'she stood at the window, staring at the billow of white dust which William's carriage had left behind it', aware that she has nothing more to do than 'than sit in the garden, with her hands in her lap and say "William!" to herself' (76). Although the couple are ultimately reconciled and she re-joins her husband for his last tour, she is motivated more by her feelings of wifely adoration than by professional ambition, and following his death she reverts to a self-imposed domestic role, leasing the theatres and retreating deeper into a negative mode of femininity, becoming transformed into a dominating salon matriarch with an obsession with social convention and feminine etiquette and a habit of meddling in the affairs of the next generation of Broome women. By the end of her life, all of her exchanges and gestures are related in some way to matters of social poise and clothing fashions, and she dies in appropriate and ironic circumstances when her dress catches fire (429).

The next generation of Broome women fare little better, constrained within an early-Victorian patriarchal social order. Lettice's son, Harry, expects a 'socially and pictorially [. . .] impeccable' wife (*Broome* 144), 'extremely beautiful and preferably fair' with 'peaceful, peaceable brown eyes' who 'must waltz well [and] [. . .] move gracefully and wear clothes as well as his mother wore them'. The criteria is extensive: 'he must be able to rely upon her to play the hostess for him perfectly. He must be able to be proud of her at the head of his dinner-table, in his carriage, on his arm. She must have a sweet and soft voice. She must understand him.' He has strong views about her mental capability too: he 'did not want a stupid woman, but he did not think it would be suitable for her to have any active talents of her own' (*ibid.*). Maud is the model angel-wife who fulfils his requirements. Prohibited from creative endeavour and civic life, she does achieve a modicum of public engagement, taking the closest to a vocational route available for wealthy Victorian wives by styling herself as a philanthropist, addressing the needs of employees in the family theatres. She is impotent in this role without her husband's authority however, obliged to coax him into benevolent acts, providing the cast with a good cooked breakfast at the end of all-night rehearsals, and buying and renovating the *Syracuse* theatre, a 'festering dust-bin' (251) to secure better conditions for the workers there. Without the power to effect changes autonomously, she has little choice but to disguise her 'great intelligence, organising power [and] common sense' (*ibid.*), and perform a shrewd feminine masquerade in order to have her will, so that 'almost it seemed' to Harry 'that Maud was soft and yielding, and meekly stupid and intelligently repentant, on purpose' (188). She attains a small

measure of liminality and role transition through charitable work which takes her overseas, but her travels end in death when she contracts a fever on one of her trips. This symbolically implies the limits of Victorian female movement; like the manner of Lettice's demise, the cause of her doom is her performative feminine identity.

Harry's second wife, Adelaide, who as the result of her subjection to the normative gendering process 'had taken on the tinge of the room', becoming a 'matron' while still very young with all 'bloom' gone (*Broome* 374–5), joins Maud, Menella, Mary Anne, and Lettice as another woman from the past compelled to comply with cultural demands to subscribe to hegemonic models of feminine conduct. The alternatives are a liminal shift to the socially despised cultural margins, which Isabella and Teresa choose, or the madhouse, Hariot's doom. Harry's daughter, Donna, is more successful at gaining an androgynous identity because her natural disinclination to adopt a feminine pose is aided by a degree of expansion in opportunities for women in the theatre during the fin-de-siècle period. Loosely based on Matilda, grand-daughter of William of Conqueror, who was also unpopular because of her lack of feminine charm, she is the opposite of the generic literary heroine. Lacking in beauty and overflowing with of ire, she treats her familial abusers with regular doses of invidious 'heavy temper, [. . .] sullen ways, [. . .] inaccessibility, [and] uncontrollable explosions of passion' (260). Dane's philosophy of personality is caught between her prevailing belief in congenital traits, Donna's inveterate Broome family 'instinct' for dominance and power combined with a 'stubbornness' (320) inherited from Maud, and her progressive grasp of women's legitimate anger with what Humble calls 'the operation of a powerful pro-domestic ideology' in Victorian and early twentieth-century culture, reflected and sanctioned in patriarchal literature (Humble 196). Subjugated by Lettice's feminine compulsion to make her a 'pattern young woman' in 'spotless fashionable clothes' and constrain her within an 'enforced maiden gentility' (*Broome* 320) and her father's selfish and brutal ambition to 'break her in' as an actress in order for her to be 'useful' to him in his theatre business (263), she lives under a double oppression, domestic petrification and workplace regimentation: 'from the moment I get up to the moment I go to bed', she rages, 'I wear pink and white muslin and I'm under somebody's eye [and] even when I'm acting with father I'm ruled and regulated' (281). Her story is invested with the same 'modernist spirit' exemplified in Ivy Compton-Burnett and Agatha Christie's impetus 'to upset the Victorian image of home, sweet home' (Light 61), but whereas Christie and Compton-Burnett's literary homes are generally poisoned by female antagonists and 'the saga hero is a father-figure, [. . .] usually open and supportive' (Bridgwood 193), Dane's domestic environments are blighted by the powerful will of tyrannous husbands and fathers and she contests the validity of the patres familias. Walking in the insidious footsteps of Jamie, Ludovic, Charles

and Nicholas Babyon, Harry Broome's mistreatment of Donna radically overturns popular conventions of idealised fatherhood. Gratified that he has 'accumulated an extremely large fortune' to bequeath to his male descendants, he makes his son, Gilly, 'the centre of his life', the manager of his theatres (*Broome* 334). He is fiercely averse, on the other hand, to his 'dark, silent, scowling' recalcitrant and androgynous daughter, who he regards as 'a masculine, new-womanish type' unappealing because she is 'always with a book in her hand' (259), a ridiculous and clumsy 'giantess in white muslins', whose bedroom is terrifyingly and 'singularly unfeminine [with] no pictures, no flowers, no ornaments, no fallals' (89). His antipathy explodes periodically in sadistic attacks; in one he 'cuffed her repeatedly on the cheek and ear [. . .] struck her again and again till she and he were alike dazed by his violence' (262), and following the successful first stage in her rite of passage, in which she steers away from the intolerable restraints he imposes upon her and finds safe harbour in the arms of a gentle middle-aged Irishman, Sir Joscelyn Pallas, she continues to 'feel her father's long strong hand holding her chin in a vice, and see his cold, implacable face in front of her, and feel again blow after blow on her cheek' (325).

Marrying Joscelyn and moving to Brian's Fort, his home in Ireland, a ramshackle Georgian house, configured as the Anglo-Irish big house of literary tradition, she is surprisingly relatively free of gender oppression there and it becomes a place of refuge where she is 'uncriticised, unblamed' (*Broome* 319). As well as her husband's 'wife and hostess she became his companion and friend' (340) in an arrangement likely to have been recognised by inter-war readers as a modern improvement on normative Victorian married life. Outside of her father's control, she begins to flourish, Joscelyn's mild-mannered and serene spinster-sisters wholeheartedly welcome her as mistress of the house, and with 'all the days of the long journey through life in which to find herself', she determines that 'at last she would let herself go!' (319). Ireland, where Dane lived for a while and for which she felt great affection, is the land where Maud was born, and in that respect Donna's mother country, the yearned-for space of Rossetti's eponymous poem. Apart from the stifling bourgeois world, it is also the locus of therapeutic empowering possibility as the bucolic idyll was in 'Spinsters' Rest'. Commensurate with the experiences of Dane's other heroines, liminal transition into the healing space of the great outdoors generates Donna's spiritual empowerment. Her Irish garden is 'her kingdom' and queendom, 'as the theatre was her father's kingdom, as the social world was her grandmother's', her space, 'where she came into the possession of something [. . .] for which her womanhood longed, for which her nature starved' (321–2). She does not have complete free rein, however as although her husband is kindly, he limits her new found freedom and restricts her journey to autonomy. Reaching the edge of his estate one day she finds herself desisting from venturing

further because 'Joscelyn would dislike her wandering down the road by herself. It would so disturb his notions of how she should carry herself in the village' (357). Furthermore, when he dies of pneumonia, it transpires that he has financially mismanaged the estate and doomed Donna and his sisters to poverty. Thus, she is fundamentally still under patriarchal control.

Rules of patrilineal succession now come into force in Donna's life. Gilly drowns at sea, and Harry's obsession with the continuance of the family blood-line means that emotionally he can no longer afford to cut her out of the family business and leave her out of his will as he originally intended. Making her the sole heir to the Broome estate, now 'the largest theatrical combination in London' (*Broome* 335), he offers financial incentives to entice her back to London, and in need of his money to enable Joscelyn's impoverished sisters to stay on at their beloved Brian's Fort, with 'the hunted air of an animal handed over to new masters' (374), she reluctantly returns. Now she is doubly enslaved, by the regulation of her father and her emotional bondage to his new business associate, her cousin, Stephen, a married man with whom she embarks on a brief and painful affair. Becoming pregnant by him, she is in transit again, this time to a disastrous marriage of convenience with Geoffrey Angers. Her fortunes begin to improve, however, once she resolves to survive and prosper completely outside of patriarchal interference by throwing herself into the work of the theatre in order to protect herself against the possibility that her father might alter his will in Stephen's favour. Consumed by 'a sick black rage' against Harry (325), she determines from a young age to cause gender trouble, to bring down the house of the father, 'bethink herself of his methods and use them, if need be, against himself' (268). After he dies, her motives and ambitions extend beyond revenge and she aspires for power in the theatre world and efficacy in her personal life. The combined demands of work and motherhood leave her without the time to satisfy Geoffrey's need for attention and affection, which she finds increasingly burdensome. She 'hated to be nagged' and becomes aware that 'she was the masculine half of that partnership, and as she grew older and the habit of controlling her company, her child and her life grew fixed, she found Geoffrey's more feminine qualities a nuisance and a bore' (446). In the inter-war period, although 'the idea that a married life [. . .] may be a kind of limitation for women, could appear in the popular novel without fear of shocking its readers' (Light 167) still, 'very few novels by women in the period [. . .] described a woman finally giving up love and marriage for her career' because 'the staple readership of the circulating libraries was largely women who [. . .] if they were unmarried, [. . .] were presumed to be longing not to be' (Beauman 82). *Broome Stages* is one of these 'very few novels' that challenge romantic convention. Donna readily agrees to Geoffrey's request for divorce, and as a happy divorcee she exemplifies

Dane's personal belief that living free as a single woman is preferable to enduring an inadequate marriage.

Contemporary feminist theatre-historians have noted that in the Victorian era actresses could only 'escape the tyranny of the actor-managers' (Hollidge 36) if they resolved upon 'entering management [to] free themselves to shape their own careers' which some indeed did, 'in spite of the odds against them' (Powell 66 73). Celebrating the '"woman's movement" through developments in the theatre' was the focus of Webster's address to The Women's Freedom League; in it she praises women who 'played an important part in the great joint managements', observing how 'today the work of women in the theatre is much extended' (*The Vote* June 30 1933). She specifically references Dane's close friend, Sybil Thorndike as 'among the noted women's managers' (ibid.). In the Victorian vanguard of this development, Donna becomes the first woman in the Broome dynasty to forge a managerial role in the theatre. Through her focalisation, the novel argues that this is a perfectly tenable state of affairs; she cites real-life Victorian women theatre managers to make her point: 'I have been managing my own companies in America these ten years', she retorts to Stephen: 'besides, you talk as if a woman running her own company were an event. Look at Mary Anderson. Look at Madame Vestris. Look at Mrs Lane down at Hoxton' (*Broome* 451).¹⁸ Changes in gendered employment practices reflect modernisation at a broader cultural level, and the Broome family consolidate, extend or lose power according to how well they adjust to changing theatrical and cultural norms. Donna's business acumen enables her to exploit a fin-de-siècle zeitgeist comprising audiences 'sufficiently daring' to attend modern performances, 'whose taste was [. . .] just being educated by the aesthetic craze' (457), and she revives a play considered too controversial when it first appeared, consequently triumphing over the economic slump of the late Victorian period and sweeping clean, buying Stephen out of their jointly owned theatres, *The Genista* and *The New Broome*. Her male and so inevitably less-able cousin, on the other hand, struggles in vain to fill his remaining theatre, *The Gloriana*, resorting to outdated popular dramas and crass commercialisation to keep it afloat: 'a series of shabby experiments – a Jubilee Ball, a pantomime with a talking horse for hero, a water pageant, disreputable gala nights, circus enterprises and the forlorn ventures of closet dramatists, rich amateurs, and theatre sharks' (456).¹⁹ Donna is a multivalent figure with multiple roles. Alarmed by her indomitable business acumen and unfeminine intractability, Stephen likens her to 'one of the Eumenides with a whip of snakes' (470), and she is subjected to similar unflattering and reductive stereotyping by her colleagues and other Broome family members who define her according to their various conceptions of womanhood. Geoffrey regards her as 'one of these New Women, not to be broken, best avoided' (ibid.), her male business associates refer to her as 'wrong headed [. . .] a woman to obey for

the sake of peace and quiet' (ibid.), the theatre-going public only know her as a performer, 'a lesser Mrs Siddons' (ibid.),²⁰ and her ultra-feminine stepmother, Adelaide, calls her '“darling, eccentric Donna” who would look ten years younger if she would only take life more easily and spend two hours over her morning toilet, and wear her hair as everyone else did, fringed on the top' (ibid.). Less formidable in her maternal role, her manipulative son, Edmund, next-in line to Broome tyrannical governance, dismisses her as a merely 'useful, ornamental and manageable mother' (466).

In the manner of other radical historical novels, which 'explore and conceptualise identities and otherness' (De Groot 67), *Broome Stages* deconstructs the false selves attributed to Donna. As Edward's masculinist values and exploitations begin to threaten her with 'inner death' (*Broome* 560), she casts off her role as manager of what is still an enduringly patriarchal home, to her 'not a gift [but] a burden shifted' and renounces the masculine Broome-dominated theatre she has 'always hated' (492). Obeying her female 'instinct, stronger than reason' (560), she leaves the oppressive London environment where she has once again become a domestic prisoner, to retire to Ireland a second time, settling back into the slower pace of life there and reconfiguring herself as the woman she wants to be. Brian's Fort resembles Elizabeth Bowen's home, 'Bowen's Court', a space which, as Emma Liggins points out is a repository for memories and imaginative communication with ghosts, where 'isolation was innate' with rooms 'permeated by the dead' (Bowen qtd in Liggins n.p.), and Donna's redefinition emerges as Hetty, Mary and Antonina's did, through intuitivism and psycho-spiritual experience occurring in a receptive space, which returns her to the pre-symbolic. Like Antonina, her literary-spiritual sister, she escapes surveillance and prying eyes by moving to the environs of the house where she can become an observer herself. Here, she experiences a sublime epiphanous moment, a portal opening into a pantheistic space. Boundaries between self and other dissolve in a lyrical instant of transcendental unification, in which her deceased husband, all material matter and her own being merge, initiating a spiritual rebirth:

Sky, hill and the grasses pressed in upon her mind, embracing her, and she thought that voices must be urgently speaking to her also; but she heard nothing. She was all sight and touch, but her ears were stopped and her quivering soul said to her – 'You are not yet born.'

She went along by the hedge on the further side of the field. [. . .] It was a common bit of hedge, not striking or beautiful; but as she passed by, it looked at her and smiled, and she saw quite clearly that it was Joscelyn. There was his unaltered personality imbuing the hedge with life, passing through it, part of it and then part of her. She felt him become part of her and stood still, shuddering with delight.

The strange, inexplicable moment passed, and she put her hands to her eyes and rubbed them like a child who has come out of a dark room into a garden. For now she could hear as well as see: now it seemed to her that she was born. She was part of the grass on which she stood, part of the sky, part of the hill before her, part of the eternal air. She was an appearance, at one with all other appearances, and enjoying that reality indescribable of which appearance is but a symbol. The dead dog, the iron of the hoof that had killed it, the book lying open at home waiting for her to finish it, the baby [grandson] Richard, Edmund in the train, her parts that she had played a thousand times, the minds that wrote those parts, the tears that she had wept, Joscelyn, the clouds, the earth- all these were hers: all these were in her: all these were herself and she them.

(*Broome* 561–2)

There is a similitude here between Lolly Willows' discovery of a 'sisterhood of the mind' (Townsend Warner 20) and 'the ability of a witch to be herself and not *woman* as defined by society' (Brothers 208) and Donna's comparable self-exile, generating a more intuitive life and a sense of self-completion.

Although Donna's selfhood depends upon her retreat from the spiritual sterility of the patriarchal socio-economic battle field, the in-roads which she has made into public life generate a powerful matrilineal bequest. During a visit from her young daughter-in-law, Elinor, she inspires in her an enthusiasm for theatre work, teaching her stage craft and advising her on how to succeed in the profession. Elinor is Dane's most prototypically exceptional heroine. More self-consciously feminist than Donna, whose late-Victorian acculturation is evident in her antipathy to Ibsen's pro-feminist plays,²¹ she is Antonina's equivalent, a young New Woman at the end of the century, outsider in an aristocratic world, untainted by blue blood, espouser of modern liberalism. She is also Dane's approximate contemporary, 'consciously invested [. . .] with parts of [Dane's] own life' (Barrow 64). Like her author, she attends art school in Dresden, has ambitions to paint, works as an actress during the First World War, is imbued with feminist values and aspires to professional autonomy. The cultural restrictions of her youth are symbolised by her subjection to the bodily confinements of Edwardian fashions, a strategy adopted by fellow middlebrow writer, Georgette Heyer, to evoke in female inter-war readers a reminder of both the restrictions of the past and 'the limitations that are still in place' (*Woman's* 39–40). Thus, on the eve of her wedding to elderly patriarch, Sir Lewis Wybrid, the maid accidentally scorches her neck with curling-irons, and laces her bodice so 'dreadfully tight' that 'she could not breathe', ignoring her requests to 'make it looser' (*Broome* 540). Hoping to escape Victorian feminisation by throwing off her bridal apparel and eloping with Edmund, outwardly more of a modern man,

the text deconstructs the romantic rescue of popular fiction when she discovers that she has merely exchanged one patriarchal subjugation for another. It becomes increasingly clear that Edmund will not indulge her evolving feminist sensibilities, her need to be spoken to 'as if I were a man, [. . .] as if I had sense' (538), and she realises her ironic position, that he 'had broken the bars of her cage', only, 'to put a collar on her and take her out for walks on a lead' (582). As an early twentieth-century construct, he tolerates working women slightly more than his predecessors, but only on masculinist terms. He permits Elinor an acting role in his theatre company so long as she is ultimately a biddable trophy wife, believing 'he was the centre: [. . .] the actor-manager: her gaiety must be the decoration of his solidity' (582). Harry's mid-Victorian expectations of Maud reverberate uncomfortably through Edmund's marital wish list. Requiring 'a mistress and a business manager, a hostess and a pupil] . . .] he wanted a mother who put her children first, but never let the children or her motherhood get in the way when he wanted her. He wanted a kind shadow, who would yet be a woman of importance when he took her about' (564). Belonging to a post-Victorian generation however, Elinor is prepared to defy nineteenth-century normative gender ideology in order to trouble her patriarchal husband, and in contrast with Harry's effortless subjugation of Maud, Edmund becomes increasingly and anxiously aware that 'if he neglected to make [Elinor] to his pattern she would make herself to her own' (555). Indeed, after years enduring his aggressiveness towards their children and his sexual indiscretions with a string of actresses including his own son's girlfriend, she comes to see the error of making him the object of her romantic glorification, 'put[ting] him on a pedestal', thinking 'him divine when he was but a faulty creature' (597). Overcoming the kind of husband-adoration which similarly plagued Hetty, she ceases to blame herself for his shortcomings and the failure of her marriage, and sues him for divorce instead.

Unsuited to patriarchal domesticity, she has long regarded the theatre as 'her actual home, and her home the mere comfortable hotel which she kept for husband and her sons' (*Broome* 612). The theatre 'freed her true nature' and enables her to be less her husband's puppy and more 'like a dog released from a chain [in] wild high spirits' (563). Becoming a divorced professional on the cusp of middle-age, further liberates herself formerly 'bound down and repressed outside the theatre by early marriage, early motherhood, the responsibility of a household and the overbearing and exigent personality of her husband' (*ibid.*). As also transpired at the close of Donna and Antonina's rite of passage, losing a husband means gaining a life. She is now:

happier than she had ever been in her life. She worked hard: she enjoyed her work: she was not torn any more by personal passion: she had put off Edmund and her past life: and she had her children.

[. . .] For twenty years the horror of losing Edmund's love had hung over her. She had lost it, and now she rejoiced daily in the loss, because of the freedom it had given her.

(665)

Forthwith she contests the cultural stereotype internalised by her friend, Fina, who considers that if you are a single woman you are obliged to be 'a frump and wear bloomers and have short hair' (538–9); taking 'more pains with her clothes than she had done since she was twenty' (619), she re-invents herself as an attractive and self-confident model of modern professional womanhood. She proves that a woman's stage-career need not be inhibited by age, establishing herself as a ground-breaking role model for middle-aged actresses: 'at forty-nine she was still a handsome woman, just able to play young parts still, but as steadily refusing them and striking out her own line in elderly comedy' (664). Her happiness is augmented by the high standing in which she is held by young people. Her sons in particular 'took a pride in her [and] respected her authority, not as a mother but as a star' (619), and Dane's enthusiasm for modernity is conveyed by Elinor's delight in her sons' modern friends, inspired by Dane's own friendships with young actors and writers in the 1930s (Spanier qtd. in Barrow 64). In his biography, Barrow quotes the following passage from *Broome Stages* in which Elinor effuses about her place in the modern world, to convey Dane's 'own reaction to the younger generation's view of her' (ibid.):

the girls [. . .] were [. . .] astonishing, contesting elections, controlling businesses, flying. [. . .] Marvellous, terrifying post-war boys and girls, how she envied them! How she admired this generation that had bought itself bloodily a freedom of which her youth had but dreamed. Oh to have been born twenty years later into the world! Well- if she could not keep as young as she wanted to keep, and could not think as youngly as she wanted to think, at least she could watch with excitement and appreciation the younger generation. And what did it matter if they thought her grand and comic? She was grand and comic: she owned it, chuckling, for she was happy.

(665)

If successfully navigated, crossing of thresholds results in 'acclaim and positive public recognition for the women concerned' (Gómez Reus and Gifford 6); this narrative outcome is exemplified in Elinor's rite of passage, which propels her safely past the perils of re-assimilation into the patriarchal order to a state of alternative domesticity and professional success. Travelling a long journey from her betrothal to Wybird at the beginning of her narrative to her independence at its close, she no longer needs to wonder, as she did as a girl 'what the world would be like [. . .]

if you could do what you liked and earn your living, and go about by yourself [. . .] or go out to dinner with a man quite alone, and each pay for yourself – or he be your guest' (538).

Elinor's success is predicated upon her working 'like a beaver [. . .] going from theatre to theatre [. . .] to watch the [. . .] new importations, polishing, modernising herself' (*Broome* 619) and notwithstanding her position within the middle-class West End theatre establishment, she is adaptable to a modernising world. Following the commencement of the First World War, she performs tirelessly in hospitals and small theatres with her son, John, entertaining a 'new class of audience': lower middle-class working women and 'soldiers on leave' (Gale, *West* 39), asking half her usual salary and raising morale and money for the war effort. While her professional world is opening up, as 'a pre-war Napoleon' Edmund's career goes into decline in a reversal of fortune that mirrors Donna's triumph over Harry and Stephen, facilitating the more permanent presence of women at the forefront of twentieth-century theatre. Unable to accept that 'new audiences had grown up which knew not the Broomes and had no use for the problem plays, the honour dramas, and the elaborate but old-fashioned spectacles on which he had built his fortune' he becomes, 'no longer a symbol of the great traditions of the English theatre, but a commercial manager who had miscalculated his public's mood' (*Broome* 666).²² Unable to modernise, he falls back on his poorly attended old-fashioned perennial Christmas play at *The Gloriana* to compensate for diminishing touring returns, but with the coming of film, the 'cultural development which most threatened theatre' (Gale, *West* 69), he is no longer able to fill his London houses or secure the capital to see him through the crisis, and is forced to sell up.

Broome Stages shares the same purpose as other inter-war female-authored historical novels which set out to 'examine *masculinity* [as well as femininity] as a social and cultural construction' (Wallace, *Woman's* 8). Traditional beliefs in fixed family traits are superseded by a modern conviction that Edmund's ruination is more than 'the working [. . .] of the familiar curse' (*Broome* 254), elicited by the sins of the fathers. His tyrannical mood swings, like his father, Harry's, are more innovatively ascribed to historical context, specifically Victorian masculine misogynistic norms, which he internalises, and whilst celebrating the triumphs of her female protagonists and the fall of masculine power, the novel is sensitive to the defeated, invariably doomed paterfamilias, configured with more complexity and pathos than the archetypal villains of popular melodrama. Dane revisits the narrative strategy adopted in *The Lover*, employing multiple perspectivisation or 'ventriloquism' (Wallace, *Woman's* 23) to register a sense of masculine cultural bewilderment. Harry and Edmund vocalise tender emotions at variance with their manly performances of domination, the reader bears witness to their inner struggles to comprehend their alienation from their wives and children, and

these perspectives are accorded credibility. Edmund's patriarchal machinations are forgiven on account of the death of his beloved and promising illegitimate son in the First World War, recalling Kipling's famous filial bereavement which elicited Dane's profound sympathy and the mental anguish of returning soldiers and men on the home front suffering the loss of sons and brothers, which shaped the inter-war current of female opinion. The modern generation of Broome men, Richard, Gerry and John, are also devastated by the war, John in particular, who is 'shaken to pieces by the home-front panics of the previous five years' (*Broome* 663) and traumatised by the death of his brother, Henry, at the front. Defending Edmund to Richard, Elinor remarks: 'your mind's been blown about for four years, [. . .] and so has his. I'll never judge any man who's been through the last four years – ' (650).

Other cultural factors come into play to shape masculine identities. Edmund overrules Elinor's plans to send her sons to a liberal modern co-educational day school of the type that Dane herself championed, and enrolled at a traditional boarding school instead, they are subjected to sexual abuse by older pupils. The inclusion of this plot element replicates Dane's message about the perilous single-sex school environment in *Regiment of Women*. The Broome boys fare better than Louise Denny, however. Rescued by their mother's gentle care from the effects of the school as well as from their father's brutalising disciplinarian ethos, they are consequently gender-constructed along more feminine lines and this disruption of traditional masculinist models gains full narrative authorisation. John becomes an insightful, creative, and politically tolerant poet and playwright, Gerry marries an older divorcee and finds happiness as a kept man, and Richard, a compulsive reader of Conrad, one of Dane's own favourite writers, settles into a loving and mutually supportive homosexual relationship, which Elinor heartily approves, enthusiastically welcoming him and his partner, Ken to her home when they visit from America, where he has joined a general drift of actors to Hollywood. *Broome Stages* surpasses the hesitations and equivocations which put a dark stamp on Dane's representation of same-sex love in *Regiment of Women*, and her clear moral differentiation between homosexual abuse in schools and the consensual homosexual love practised by consenting adults, invalidates critical perspectives which have been overly hasty to accuse her of homophobia in that earlier text. Indeed, Richard is probably the first homosexual in literary history to be rewarded with sexual fulfilment and creative autonomy and success. Living in a post-war economic climate in which theatres were becoming increasingly commercialised, the industry struggled to compete with the new medium of cinema, and 'the running of theatres moved from actor-managers [. . .] to the investor, or financial speculator' (Gale, *West* 39), while Edmund's consequential 'hatred for the cinemas grew into an obsession' (*Broome* 666), Richard's creative energies grasp the 'lucrative possibilities of work for actors

and actresses' (Gale, *West* 69), he makes a fortune on the big screen, and invests his film profits in business ventures. His revenue bolsters the stage careers of Elinor and John and protects them from the 'new divorce between business and aesthetics' (40), enabling the family to straddle both industries: at the end of the novel, John stages a successful *Romeo and Juliet* at the O.U.D.S. and Richard's latest film plays simultaneously at a newly converted theatre down the road. Furthering the pro-homosexual agenda, John's closing aspiration to 'fall in love' (*Broome* 703) is sexually ambiguous, allowing for the possibility of future homosexual gratification and contentment. The Broome dynasty is softened, consolidated and feminised by a professional single woman and her homosexual-identified sons and where the close of *The Babyons* marks the dying of the heterosexual family dynasty, the Broomes are revitalised by blurred gender and sexual reconfigurations made possible by the liberalism of their professional modern mother.

The ideological perspective of *Broome Stages* is distinguishable from the consensus of generic female-authored sagas which sustain an adherence to 'dominant models of social ordering' and 'hetero-normative relationships and strictly defined gender roles', underpinning them with weddings and reconciliatory unions between young members of the next generation which resolve the dramatic action (De Groot 52).²³ On the other hand, G.B. Stern's 1930 saga trilogy, *The Rakonitz Chronicles*, an expanded adaption of *The Man Who Pays the Piper*,²⁴ addresses the prevailing 1920s and 1930s female middlebrow theme of the pleasure and pains of work and independence for the modern woman with less enthusiasm for gender role transfigurations than *Broome Stages* and although both are broadly feminist texts in essence, Stern's trilogy is prone to gender-political capitulation and eulogises the demise of traditional masculine and feminine roles. Dane and Stern were friends, Dane wrote a positive review of the first volume, *Tents of Israel* for *Good Housekeeping* magazine ('Family' 150), and there is a similitude between Stern's delineation of modern women with careers in the arts and the fashion industry and Dane's depiction of women in the theatre. The second Rakonitz instalment, *A Deputy Was King* centres on the life of Toni Rakonitz, a modern member of the London-branch of a bourgeois European Jewish family fallen on hard times, who forges her inter-war identity in opposition to traditional models of womanhood, running her own fashion house. She is a reluctant career woman, however, and becoming a breadwinner principally in order to support her elders, she employs the same arguments mooted by Stern in *Man Proud Man*, which question, albeit playfully, the gains of the women's movement:

I, the child of the age, the privileged daughter of the twentieth century, the beneficiary of years of fighting for women's emancipation from harem slavery, I solemnly declare that there's nothing in the

world I want quite as much, as to do no work, and, for no reason at all, to have tons of money to spend which is all made by somebody else.

(*Deputy*, Rakonitz 338)

Marrying a rich man, and delegating to him the management of her company, she is happy to assume a traditional femininity, but her husband, Giles, is a new modern effeminate type, shell-shocked, debilitated by poor health and fatigue, reliant upon his father's money, with little inclination or ability to work. When he squanders his allowance, he gives her no choice but to return to her business, in bad shape in consequence of her neglect and his misinformed and ill-judged business decisions. Humiliated by her interference, he punishes her by running away to Italy with one of her female cousins, but when he becomes dangerously ill, Toni forgives his philandering, sells her business and uses the profits to set up home in Italy, surrounding herself with husband, children and members of her extended family, in a continuance of Jewish matriarchal tradition. Stern suggests that the ultimate fulfilment of her key female protagonist is dependent on keeping hold of her husband and retreating into domesticity; 'her secret longing [. . .] was to have room for any members of the Rakonitz tribe who might at any time need to be sheltered and fed. [and] the idea of bounteous hospitality brought her a glow of comfortable satisfaction. It was, though she did not define it thus, the matriarchal instinct' (685). The sequel, *Mosaic*, set in Paris, centres on Toni's other modern cousins: Val, a successful artist, and Helen, who buys Toni's business, drives a car and has a pilot's licence. In spite of Helen's modern identity and her scorn for Victorian ultra-femininity however, like Toni, she finds the price of modern independence is too high and when the man she yearns for confides to her that he is in love with a more womanly woman, her feminist fortitude deserts her in a wave of self-loathing and she wishes she were not 'terribly smart and not a bit attractive, with a great big nose, and such quick brains that you're always doing yourself in', but more like her voluptuous and flirtatious feminine love rival: 'large and slow and stupid, with brass-gold hair [. . .] bosoms, [. . .] teasing *les messieurs*' (*Mosaic*, Rakonitz 1053). Ironically, while the narrative closes with her ambition to 'marry, one day, some decent, moderate man' (1052), the older Rakonitz generation, sisters, Berthe and Letti, have become, in their declining years, self-sufficient and self-actualising, and have relinquished a life-time of identities constructed around their domineering matriarchal Jewishness. Although Stern abjures feminine entrenchment and concludes the saga with no marriage outcome, patriarchal ideology nevertheless informs the perspective of all three volumes; male protagonists are elevated to romantic figures and there is an overriding narrative contention that matriarchal femininity and duty is the proper priority and true desire of the modern woman.

While *The Rakonitz Chronicles* doubts what has been gained through the progress of women's history, creative work and personal autonomy are proffered as viable and preferable alternatives to marriage in *Broome Stages* and Elinor's reward for enduring the strain of her obligations to meet the excessive demands of family and theatre community where 'everybody, almost without exception, needed humouring' (*Broome* 619). Dane's sagas unequivocally celebrate gender modernisations: men are demoticised and homosexualised and fairy-tale marriages are relegated to the dustbin, alongside other discarded patriarchal myths. Women are reinstated into the historical narratives from which they had traditionally been excluded and they travel hopefully, on figurative journeys to spaces which free them to reject feminine constructions, triumph over family exploitation and progress from dispossession to repossession, domesticity to professionalisation. Perhaps the narrative confidence in the free movement of modern women, outside the patriarchal stranglehold that gripped their predecessors, somewhat misrepresents the mid-twentieth century as a comfortable time for women, and can be criticised as over-optimistic, complacent, even potentially damaging to inter-war feminist struggles to improve women's conditions and increase their rights and powers. Yet in opposition to *The Rakonitz Chronicles*, 'The Villa Désirée' and *Rebecca*, Dane's sagas, like her fantastical narratives, are undoubtedly pro-feminist in relation to their radical constructions of female sexual identity and the challenges issued to structures of masculine power and authority.

Notes

1. 'Marvellous' and 'Fantastic' are umbrella terms, encompassing fairy tale, ghost story and gothic novel.
2. Barrow testifies that Dane 'very firmly believed in ghosts' (131). She questioned normative assumptions about the nature of reality in a review of contemporary fairy stories, insisting that her own dream landscape was 'a much more real place' to her than her memories of actual past experiences and spaces and asking: 'if seeing is believing, if hearing, touching, tasting, tears and laughter are proofs of reality, how can we doubt our dreams?'. Her fantasy fiction addresses a question that was undoubtedly important to her: 'if reality is not a question of the five senses, then what [...] is reality, and where shall we set up the boundary-stones of belief' ('Faerylands' 150). She empathised with the 'psychic' minority gifted with an 'instinctive recognition of life outside our life, of lives behind us and lives to come which they must not too explicitly acknowledge lest they be laughed at' and alerted her readers to be sceptical of 'spiritualism, and yet believe that the spirit survives' (ibid.). Her spiritualism was immortalised by Coward's portrayal of her as medium, Madam Arcati in *Blythe Spirit*.
3. In a review of ghost stories in 1923, S.M. Ellis, for instance, refers without scepticism to 'an authenticated case': an 'apparition touched a woman's arm, which immediately became paralysed and remained useless for two weeks after' (1001).

4. She admired the ways in which their novels explored the psychic inner consciousness of protagonists within realist contexts, or 'annexed to the domain of the traditive novel the sovereignty of the inner, the unexpressed, perhaps inexpressible world of the soul' (*Traditive* 42).
5. The categorisation of gothic writing on gender issues has been much debated. 'Female Gothic' is used to refer to female authored texts, while 'feminine Gothic' often describes texts whose speaking subject is a woman (Smith, Andrew and Wallace, Diana, 'The Female Gothic. Then and Now'). Smith and Wallace contend that both terms are variously employed to describe both feminist and non-feminist texts and cite Diane Hoeveler who uses the term 'gothic feminism', to label those particularly progressive texts where the heroine masquerades as a conventional victim within an oppressive patriarchal society, while working quietly 'utilising passive-aggressive and masochistic strategies to triumph over that system' (2). Diana Wallace sees the ghost story which emerged in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century as a separate much more subversive modern genre than the gothic, which 'enabled women writers to evade the marriage plots which dominated the earlier Radcliffean Female Gothic, meaning that they could offer a more radical critique of male power, violence and predatory sexuality than was possible in either the realist, or indeed Gothic, novel' (Wallace, 'Uncanny Stories', 57).
6. Lucie Armitt explains how 'the work of Jacques Lacan is seen to have application to fantasy texts. For in his well-known ideas about the mirror stage of infantile development [. . .] the mirror is repeatedly found as a double-sided symbol, which, as well as having its conventional, mimetic properties, likewise functions as a metaphorical gateway facilitating entry into another world, realm or stage of character development' (46).
7. According to Bingham (169), the concept of the companionable marriage was first referred to in *The Revolt of Modern Youth* (1928) by Ben Lindsey and Wainwright Evans.
8. March-Russell points out the psychoanalytic significance of the title in his introduction (2006) (10).
9. In addition, *The Helpmate* (1907), 'made a major assault on the Victorian stereotype of the sexless angel in the house', reflecting the author's belief in 'the importance of sexual drives and the harmful effects of sexual repression' (Radford, Jean vi) and 'Where Their Fire is not Quenched' (1921), the protagonist, receives an appropriate after-life punishment for her sexual self-denial, for rejecting a physical relationship as not sufficiently spiritual, when she descends into a hell of her own making, running eternally from her lover's advances and brought at every corner to an ever-repeated onset of sexual assault.
10. In the original 'Mother Holle' (Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm), a virtuous girl undertakes a journey to a magical land. At the start of the narrative, made to work long hours at a weaving loom by her wicked stepmother, her lacerated fingers bloody the spindle, which then drops into the well when she tries to clean it. On the order of her stepmother, she jumps in to retrieve it, becoming unconscious in the process and when she wakes, she finds that she has been transported into a beautiful rural idyll. After successfully completing two magical tasks which prove her kind nature, she comes to the cottage of a benevolent old woman, Mother Holle, who offers her a home in exchange for household help. Initially the girl is happy but after some time she wishes to return to the real world. Mother Holle rewards her for her service with a pile of gold and a beautiful dress and transports her home.
11. Dane complained that: 'when I ask for a good book and am returned *The Whole Duty of a Christian* I can't help feeling that the English language is

not adapting itself to my personal needs as tactfully as it might' ('Best Sellers' 20). She also argued that interpretations of the creation myth should refocus on the positive attributes of Eve: the 'strength of Eve maternal, not of Eve enchantress' ('Capes' 113). She objected to early twentieth-century divorce ruling – which she famously challenged in *Bill of Divorcement* – on the grounds that it was founded on patriarchal Christian edicts which made falsifying and constraining constructions of women. She called it: 'the last stronghold of the old bad disbelief in the soul of the creature Woman, in the tradition that she, the crooked rib of the man God made upright, was but half human, had but half a soul and that half, when it was not directly mischievous, at least so childish, so irresponsible, that she could not be allowed to exist as an independent creature at all' (*Women's* 107). Inter-war feminist writer, Rebecca West, was of the opinion that 'pagan ritualism' was 'senseless and exacting' (255), but Dane demurred. In 'The Mother Night', *Good Housekeeping* (December 1925), 114, she condemns the 'clerical zeal [which] damned and uglified all that was ancient and strange, and fanaticism [which] debased holy Pan into a horrific and filthy devil, reduced Perchta the bright and shining to a nightmare, turned benign and Holder, the sender of the snow, into the old woman with a long nose and the feather-bed of the fairy tales, and denied to Nereids, Oreads and Dryads, immortal souls' (ibid., 115). In the preface to 'Spinsters' Rest', she establishes the story's female pagan associations, quoting from a book on Grimm mythology which traces the source of the Mother Holle figure to Norse legend.

12. Mother Holle's benign magical powers recall Gilbert and Gubar's analysis of women's literature as the 'subversive transfiguration of those female arts into the powerful arts of the underground weaver woman, [. . .] who uses her magical loom to weave a distinctly female "tapestry of paradise", [. . .] not just the place from which the past is retrieved but the place where the future is conceived' (Gilbert and Gubar 102).
13. Although Gilbert and Gubar do not read the poem psychoanalytically, they cite 'Mother Country' to describe what many feminist critics see as the essential blight of all women in a patriarchal society, permanently expelled from this '“land of our birth” [who] remain forever refugees, wishing to return to the lost utopia, haunted by a wish-fulfilment phantasy' (Armitt 59). Other literary representations of the female domain include 'An Island' (1838), by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, which celebrates a utopian paradise where all creatures are 'glad and safe. [. . .] No guns or springs in my dream' (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar 103).
14. Reflecting on the way Benji (his father) and Vanessa are socially ostracised because they are living together outside marriage, Tom refers to *The Woodlanders*, which he is currently reading, in order to endorse their way of life: 'the writer of that book would understand if he were here and would come to see them and be their friend' (*Herries* 32).
15. *The Times* called it 'a fine achievement', the *Daily Herald* described it as 'a beautiful, disturbing book' and it was held in high regard in the provincial press. *Week-end Review* hailed it as, 'a fine piece of work, beautifully written and exhibiting everywhere an imagination of great formative and assimilative power' (Flyleaf. *Broome Stages* 1933). *The Townsville Daily Bulletin* called it 'mellow, mature, magnificent' (Barrymore, F 'Books Received'). The *Oakland Tribune* described it as 'a monumental artistic achievement' which 'reveals an unerring instinct of analysing human emotions and a rich understanding of life elements' (Sept 4th 1932). The *Sydney Land* called it a 'remarkable achievement' ('Broome Stages'), and in its Christmas Book

- Review Section, *The Winnipeg Free Press* found it to be 'admirably written, with intense sympathy and understanding' ('Broome Stages' December 5, 1931). The *Melbourne Advocate* described it as a novel 'which stands shoulder to shoulder with the best novels produced by any country in recent years' (May 3 1934). Barrow compares it favourably with *The Forsyte Saga* as 'achieving a more satisfying whole than Galsworthy did' because 'Galsworthy did not have the same thread, nor the sense of completion' (Barrow 63).
16. Planta-genista, another term for Plantagenet, is the Latin word for broom: Henry 11 wore a sprig of it in his battle helmet.
 17. Tracy Davis' term for female actor-managers (275).
 18. Madame Vestris was the first woman to run a theatre company, taking over management of the Olympic shortly before the start of Queen Victoria's reign. Seeing herself as a 'warrior woman', she identified with Joan of Arc (qtd. in Powell 70). Sarah Lane took over the working-class Britannia theatre in Hoxton from her husband – who had demanded from her, 'a meek submission to his own rule and guidance' after his death (Crauford, qtd. in Powell 69). She built a successful career with plays which represented women as 'magnetic [and] heroic' (Powell 131). Mary Anderson managed plays at the Lyceum from 1887 (67). Mary Webster makes reference to the illustrious management career of Fanny Kemble, 'the first woman, of whom we have record, who took an interest in the political and social affairs of the day' (The Vote June 30 1933).
 19. According to Powell (49), wealthy titled amateurs started to enter the theatre in the late nineteenth century, making the institution more respectable but less creative perhaps.
 20. John Styan calls famed Victorian actress Mrs Siddons, one of the 'great creative artists' (301) and a 'great tragic actress' (305), and Powell describes how she 'dominated the stage with her flashing eyes and clarion voice, spellbinding her audience' (51).
 21. Ibsen wrote social rather than society drama (Hollidge 2); *A Doll's House* for instance, 'provided a powerful way of exploring and revealing the truth about the marriages of the characters' (Styan 340).
 22. Oscar Wilde was the most famous exponent of this style of play which always began 'at the crisis so the audience was plunged quickly into the predicament of the hero or heroine' (Styan, p. 332). Dane indicates that Edmund, like Wilde, is out of fashion after the war.
 23. According to Bridgwood, examples of writers of female chronicles who subscribe to this ethos include Daphne Du Maurier and Georgette Heyer (172).
 24. *The Rakonitz Chronicles* comprised *Tents of Israel*, first published as a stand-alone novel in 1924 and re-issued in 1932, together with *A Deputy Was King* and *Mosaic*.

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5 Subverting the Models of Golden-Age Detective Fiction

While Dane was embedding domestic-modernist perspectives in gothic texts and family sagas, the detective novel was enjoying a ‘Golden Age’ and fast becoming the most popular and prolific middlebrow genre of all. Evolving from popular thrillers, mysteries and sensation fiction into a discrete form by 1920, it ‘account[ed] for one quarter of all new novels published in the English language’ by 1939 (Watson 96). Retrospectively termed ‘Golden Age’ to reflect its success and popularity, the genre was established with E.C. Bentley’s 1913 novel *Trent’s Last Case* (Haycraft 113), and soon featured women’s writing by the four ‘queens of crime’ (Kaplan 144): *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* by Agatha Christie in 1920, *Whose body?* by Dorothy L. Sayers in 1923, *Sweet Danger* by Margery Allingham in 1933, and *A Man Lay Dead* by Ngaio Marsh in 1934. Lesser-known authors and texts included *Speedy Death* by Gladys Mitchell and *The Man in the Queue* by Josephine Tey, both published in 1929. Along with a raft of middlebrow writers, Dane migrated to this upcoming genre in the hope of penning ‘money makers’ (Mann 49): as Charles Evans, one of Heinemann’s chief readers, joked when he first suggested the idea of writing a detective novel to Dane and Simpson in 1928, ‘if only the two of you could write books like this [. . .] instead of your intellectual novels – you would both make a fortune!’ (qtd. in Barrow 58). Evans provided the plot outline for their first book part of a co-authored detective trilogy featuring amateur sleuth, Sir John Saumarez, comprising *Enter Sir John* (1928), *Printer’s Devil* (1930), and *Re-enter Sir John* (1932). As the source of Alfred Hitchcock’s second talking picture, *Murder!* (1930), *Enter Sir John* was responsible for the establishment of the cinematic courtroom drama, complete with the deliberating-jury trope that inspired films such as *Twelve Angry Young Men* (dir. Lumet 1957) and became a staple film and TV genre. The authors’ individual contributions to the novels are pretty indistinguishable. Dane was reported to have said of *Enter Sir John*, ‘we used to take the greatest delight in imitating each other’s style; so that when a rash friend said, “now I know it was you who wrote that chapter,” it invariably turned out to be the other one!’ (qtd. in Barrow 60). All three novels

enjoyed good critical reviews and as late as 1988 Dane was regarded as 'a major writer of detective stories', of merit and importance (Barrow 61). Apprehensive that in *Enter Sir John*, 'two such accomplished writers [. . .] might, in a form unfamiliar to either of them, have fallen something short of their purpose', *The Times Literary Supplement* expressed relief that 'fortunately for everyone concerned no sort of hesitation is called for' ('Enter' 182), and it praised *Re-enter Sir John* for keeping 'us continually interested and amused' ('Re-Enter' 424).¹ In his seminal 1941 work on detective fiction, *Murder for Pleasure*, Howard Haycraft cited the two writers in his list of nineteen 'additional names' (154) which did not quite make his catalogue of twelve key writers but were key to 'the development [. . .] of the British detective story between the First World War and circa 1930 [and] most significantly *influenced*' its 'progress' (ibid.). The only other female writers acknowledged were fellow 'additional' author, Dorothy Fielding, and top-twelve novelists, Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers. He also includes *Re-enter Sir John* in another list: of Detective Story 'cornerstones' (302). More recently, Simon Brett has contended that Dane's 'name is still reasonably well known, at least to crime fiction buffs' (vi).

Despite the fact that they did not quite fulfil the criterion for membership – that collaborators should have already 'written at least two detective-novels of admired merit' (Brett iv) – on the strength of the reception of *Enter Sir John*, Dane and Simpson were invited in 1929, the year of its inception, to join The Detection Club of London, an organisation formed by a group of predominant middlebrow crime writers including Sayers and Christie, which also admitted Gladys Mitchell in 1933 and Margery Allingham in 1934.² As a member, Dane was approached by the BBC in 1930 to collaborate with club-authors, Sayers, Christie, Bentley, Anthony Berkeley and Freeman Wills Croft on *The Scoop*, a crime story for the radio, subsequently serialised in *The Listener* and eventually published in book form by Victor Gollanz in 1983. An episodic narrative in the style of a round robin, each writer contributed one or two chapters which built upon the preceding inputs. Following the success of *The Scoop*, in 1931 Dane contributed a chapter to a second collaborative Detection Club novel, *The Floating Admiral*, which is still in print. The principle aim of the Detection Club was to work to a benchmark of literary quality by following a rigid set of rules or guidelines relating to plot and structure designed to guarantee water-tight stories and to nurture, sustain and 'assert the dignity of the genre' (Ascari 3). These rules were compiled by author, Ronald Knox, and published in a 'Detective Story Decalogue' which prefaced his edited anthology of *Best Detective Stories* and 'served as a guiding list of dos-and-don'ts for detective writers' (Brauer 3). The list was then refined by G.K. Chesterton in his role as first president of The Detection Club, and its premises reinforced by American author, SS Van Dine in his 'Twenty Rules for Writing Detective

Stories' (qtd. in Brauer 3). Emerging crime writers were judged by their peers at the time according to their fidelity to these directives.

Taking more of a Cultural Studies approach, contemporary critics of golden age fiction are less concerned with the quality of the writing and more inclined to think of it as a form of popular modernism (Light 66). They attend to the extent to which it reflected, registered and mirrored inter-war anxieties and preoccupations, interrogated dominant inter-war ideologies and shaped the cultural hegemony. The overriding critical consensus is that it was an inherently conservative genre, which upheld traditional privilege and the established order and moulded public opinion along ideological lines. In *Bloody Murder* (1972), Julian Symons was the first to describe its practitioners as 'unquestionably Right-wing [and] overwhelmingly conservative in feeling' (105) and to note the ubiquity of racial, class and gender stereotyping. Others concurred. Colin Watson (1979), George Grella (1970), John Cawalti (1980) and Warren Chernaik (2000) all argue that Golden Age writers relished punishing their fictional law-transgressors as a means of conveying to their middle-class readership the validity of normative ideology, to provide reassurance that cultural stability was assured within the traditional social structure. There are those who disagree with this interpretation however. Maurizio Ascari contends that ideological conformity was confined to the mainstream and 'the genre as a whole cannot be reduced to its bourgeois, capitalist, chauvinist and sexist dimensions'. In some texts he detects radical elements, evolving from the subversions, surfacing repressions and counter-cultural representations of legal injustices found in its root genres: gothic, sensational and crime writing (9). Samantha Walton also argues that a political continuum exists, with 'escapist, conservative, socially detached' writing at one end and 'socially engaged, ethically confrontational and highly self-reflective' work at the other (278). On the topic of women's contributions to the genre, most critics view female outputs as equally marked by homogenous class and racial prejudice, as politically indistinguishable from the work of their male counterparts. Kaplan remarks that women's 'social fears are habitually expressed through a class-bound, mildly xenophobic, crudely anti-Semitic, and racist consciousness' (147) and Jessica Mann argues that 'famous women crime novelists were conventional, conformist and conservative' (13). In terms of gender politics, however, with the exception of Kathleen Klein, who believes they subscribed to a 'world view [where] women are put in their proper, secondary places' (2), critics generally consider women writers as more liberal. Susan Rowland (164), Megan Hoffman (147), Gill Plain (47), Munt (29) and Rosalind Coward and Linda Semple (47) identify radical and subversive tendencies and challenges to the rigid conventions of the genre. They note that formal rules and formulas are rejected in favour of strong plot elements outside of the investigative narrative which push that narrative to the boundaries of the text, leaving space for women's issues.³ Sayers is often

championed as the female writer who predominantly broke the rules and broadened the genre to this end. She has been defined as a 'staunchly feminist' New Woman writer (Kaplan 152–3) who firmly centralised the theme of female identity, deploying sympathetic female characters and creating strong bonds between fictional women (Young 40), and called to attention unequal power in sexual relations, underlined the importance of professional work to a personal integrity in opposition to traditional femininity, and renegotiated power within traditional and 'romance' based marriages (Rowland 159).⁴ In the light of current critical debates around the ideologies at work within women's texts in the genre and the extent to which they contested its rigid structure and normative social and gender-related values, both the Saumarez trilogy and Dane's solo works are, I would argue, more progressive than most other female golden-age texts with which they will be compared in this chapter. Dane and Simpson's writings belong to a feminist place in the gender-political spectrum, breaking with traditional attitudes to race, nationalism, regionalism and social class, and reaching the wide readership that was enthusiastic about this new form of writing to promote distinctive liberal-feminist agendas and egalitarian messages.

Detectives, Villainy and Masculinities

In *Enter Sir John*, located in a small Welsh town hosting a touring repertory company, a local landlady discovers the corpse of one of her actresses, Magda Bruce, in her room in the presence of fellow actress, Martella Baring, who is blood stained and apparently suffering from fugue. Martella is arrested, tried, and following a protracted debate by the jury about capital punishment, which forefronts the authors' own antipathy to the practice, she is convicted of murder. Sir John Saumarez, grand-master of Shakespearean production and 'England's leading actor-manager' in the West-End theatre (*Enter* 211), who remembers having once auditioned Martella, reads about the case and travels to Wales to prove her innocence, assisted by the theatre-company manager, Novello Markham. After making local enquiries, the investigation shifts to London where the two men track down Handell Fane, Magda's former lover, Martella's friend and a 'dark skinned' actor in the troupe (23). As the plot unravels, Sir John engineers Fane's capture and confession and Martella is released from police custody to become Saumarez's wife and lead actress in his London theatre company. *Printers' Devil*, whose title is a pun on a printing-industry term for an apprentice or errand-boy, centres on the death of successful female London publisher, Horrie Pedlar. Suspecting foul play, Savory, her unassuming business manager, unearths evidence to incriminate Marmion Poole, once a celebrity-poet and one of Horrie's friends and clients. In his final confession, he admits committing the crime as an act of revenge against Horrie for her refusal to publish

his poor-quality and libellous memoirs, which he believes has meant the defeat of his ambition to revive his public profile and resurrect his career. In *Re-enter Sir John*, when Saumarez's young American actor-protégée, Peter Varley, is caught apparently cheating at cards at Sir John's London club and subsequently disappears into the night, his girlfriend, Jill, joins forces with Saumarez to clear his name. On a visit to Peter's lodgings to interview his landlady, Mrs Lake, they find her missing and are informed by the police that she has just been found dead of a heart attack. The coroner records a verdict of natural causes, but Saumarez becomes suspicious and while Jill searches for Peter, he proceeds to investigate her death. Through a theatrical re-enactment, in the manner of Hamlet's play-within-a-play, he stages the murder, revealing fellow club-member, Sir George Clayton as the murderer, driven to silence Mrs Lake to prevent her from revealing her knowledge of his secret shame – that he is Peter's father from an illicit and compromising relationship. Peter now comes out of hiding and is reunited with Jill.

Compared with golden-age writing in general, the trilogy is relatively free of class prejudice and celebrates a modernising society where hard graft rather than privilege are new, modern markers of high status. This amounts to a contestation of the saccharine nationalistic sentiments which generally pervade the genre, in which female-authored texts have been found as guilty as their male counterparts of harbouring 'a sentimental affection for the gentry and aristocracy as well as [. . .] a lingering nostalgia for [. . .] deferential homogeneous pre-war society' (Kaplan 147).⁵ The underlying social snobbery of these writers is certainly evident in their preference for commanding detectives with an aristocratic superiority, which they go to great lengths to expound. Margery Allingham's Albert Campion studied at Rugby and St. Ignatius College, Cambridge; Ngaio Marsh's Inspector Roderick Alleyn and Sayers' Lord Wimsey are both Oxford-educated second sons of Lords, brought up in luxury on the family baronial estate. Christie is the only crime queen who rejects 'romantic conservatism' and 'cleaving to the aristocratic as a mark of a better past or a model for the good life' (Light 81); it is precisely this holding fast to a romanticised lost feudal past which in her 1937 novel *Busman's Honeymoon* (1937) motivates Harriet to become Wimsey's wife: 'he carried about with him all that permanent atmosphere of security', she reflects proudly, 'he belonged to an ordered society [. . .] She thought, "I have married England"' (105). All of the 'queens' write a pastoral aesthetic, situating their novels in rural idylls, principally in the English Home Counties, completely ignoring the rest of the country and the United Kingdom as a whole (Rowland 62). Dane and Simpson's fiction, on the other hand, comes a little closer to the purpose of Raymond Chandler's hard-boiled urban narratives: to 'get murder away from the upper classes, the weekend house party and the vicar's rose garden' (qtd. in Chernaik 105), radicalising the genre by writing of towns and cities, the

urban world of London theatres, metropolitan offices, rudimentary and often impoverished flats, and in *Enter Sir John*, industrial Wales, 'on the edge of coal country' (1). In contrast to a golden-age anti-provincialism, focalised by Marsh in her 1938 novel, *Artists in Crime* through Ngaio Marsh's assistant sleuth, Nigel Bathgate's dismissal of the testimony of a crime witness as unreliable because she is a 'quaint little piece of Staffordshire' (558), the Midland and Northern towns associated with John Saumarez's family origins 'Stockport, Clacton, and Burton-upon-Trent' are afforded more dignity. (*Enter* 108). Saumarez comes from a markedly ordinary social background. Born 'plain Johnny Simmonds' (*Re-Enter* 48), he is a life peer, hailing from a self-made Northern industrialist family, and in contrast to the normative model of the golden-age detective, aristocratic, generally 'a public school and an Oxford man' (Light 77) with 'the personal flair which comes naturally to members of a certain class' (Ousby 78), he is averse to received pronunciation, his 'school had been that of Life' (*Re-Enter* 22), and his wealthy status is 'his own achievement', the fruit of his business acumen combined with acting and managerial talents in the theatre and the film industries (220). Alleyn is equally enthusiastic about the theatre, and his passion for Shakespearian drama – the first scene in *Hamlet*, in particular – features throughout Marsh's work, in her 1934 novel, *A Man lay Dead* (168), her 1938 novel, *Death in a White Tie* (266, 479) and her 1941 novel *Death and the Dancing Footman* (556),⁶ yet the different social class of the two sleuths determines their quite different relationships to the stage. For Alleyn, it signifies pleasure and leisure, but for Sir John it is economic necessity. *Punch* praised Dane and Simpson's decision to make their sleuthing hero a modern hard-working celebrity rather than an outmoded 'aristocrat', calling 'Sir John [. . .] the triumph of the book [. . .] the perfect actor-manager, that every actor-manager should wish to be' (Preface *Re-Enter* n.p.). Marsh intends Alleyn to invoke admiration in the reader and protagonist *despite* his decision to work for a living – as one character remarks, 'he has had an expensive education [. . .] he began in the Diplomatic service [and] it was for private [not financial] reasons he became a policeman' (*A Man* 141). Sir John, on the other hand, was esteemed by reader and reviewer alike precisely *because* of his work ethic and modest origins.

Saumarez is more democratic than Alleyn, intermingling comfortably with ordinary people, and feeling an affinity with them despite their lowly backgrounds. In *Enter Sir John*, he invites Markham and his wife, Doucie, to dine with him at his house, even though they are obscure members of the minor acting troupe at the centre of the investigation and in *Re-enter Sir John* he feels a tender regard for working-class murder victim, Mrs Lake. Conversely, Allingham's novels resolutely endorse a 'desire for a near-mythical golden age of social cohesion' based on a fixed hierarchy (Rowland 54), and Campion's contempt for his social inferiors is palpable. In 1941 novel *Traitor's Purse*, he is nauseated by a 'Cockney' taxi

driver's 'bright little eyes and thin rodent's face of his race' (152) and he treats his devoted assistant, former-convict, Lugg, as little more than an idiot servant. Rowland's contention that Alleyn's profession democratises him (44) is debatable too.⁷ He shuns the working and middle classes, seeking refuge away from his work among his social equals: his mother, Lady Alleyn of Bucks, the embodiment of the idle rich, who dabbles in weaving and other rural crafts 'extremely and surprisingly well' (*Artists* 639), and his future wife, Agatha Troy, residing comfortably at her mansion inherited from her 'landed-gentry' father (477), complete with tennis court, extensive grounds and a drive so long and winding that it 'seemed an age' before Alleyn first reaches the door in his car (490). His sidekick, Bathgate, only becomes an appropriate sleuthing companion when he is elevated in *A Man lay Dead* from impoverished lower-middle-class journalist to inheritor of a country estate. Any unpalatable aristocrats in Marsh's novels are the bad apples in an otherwise healthy cart topped with Alleyn, Lady Alleyn, Troy, Bathgate, and minor gentrified characters such as Lady Carrados. Providing a benchmark for right aristocratic behaviour, their integrity and good sense are pitted against interlopers who buy their way into the gentry, and old nobles who misguidedly attempt to discard old ways and modernise their lives, such as Captain Maurice Withers in *Death in a White Tie* (102, 107, 112). Alleyn is known to ridicule the lower orders; he refers to a servant witness/suspect as 'an extraordinary little apparition in curling-pins and red flannel' with 'a mouth that looked as if she constantly said "Ooo"' (*Artists* 585) and is actually physically squeamish about servants in general; obliged to carry the small daughter of a third gardener indoors, afterwards 'his first action [. . .] was to wash himself very thoroughly' (*A Man* 89). He regards left-wing politics as the refuge of the most unenlightened members of the essentially ignorant lower middle class and is particularly antagonistic to home-bred communists who 'do a certain amount of mischief, they're an almighty nuisance' (*Nursing Home* 477). Moreover, he derides all things modern: alternative medicine, bohemianism, and people who believe popular psychology, who 'nosed' into Freud and internalise 'psychological clap-trap' (*Artists* 581). Yet, although he speaks for Marsh's own firm loyalty towards and identification with an archaic upper-class culture, he is a somewhat polysemic creation. More responsive to economically disadvantaged characters than his friends and assistants, he is paradoxically both semi-liberal and representative of the establishment and status quo. He 'never made too much fun of anybody' (*Nursing Home* 479), and an 'inevitable charwoman with her bucket of oil and soot, and her obscene grey wipes so like a drowned rat' (641–2), is more an object of pity than derision.

It is unusual, although not unknown, for male sleuths penned by female golden-age authors to betray 'loss of Holmesian confidence' or fallibility (Rowland 19). Alleyn, Campion and Wimsey are the consistent

voices of masculine rightness and reason and as Symons notes, 'it would be charitable to think that Wimsey [. . .] was conceived as a joke but, unhappily, there is every indication that Sayers regarded him with the most delicate regard' (109–10). Saumarez, however, while certainly not anti-heroic, is irreverently pulled off the pedestal of perfection from time to time, and this evidences Dane and Simpson's contestation of patriarchal authority in counterpoint to their peers. They digress from the normative model by employing disruptive feminist humour; their perspective of Saumarez fluctuates between admiration and gentle mockery, his dignity is not spared and his authority sometimes undermined. The *Times Literary Supplement* calls attention to his 'little weaknesses' ('Re-Enter' 424), targets of the novel's 'good natured satire' ('Enter' 182); Jill and Martella's steady faith in Peter's innocence exposes his faulty judgement which 'transformed' him 'in an instant to a blunderer and a boor' (*Re-Enter* 72). Christie is similarly playful with Poirot, 'theatrical, more of a Falstaff than a soldier hero, who enjoys playing to the gallery' (Light 73), and Saumarez, the literal player, notwithstanding his status as respected actor-manager, is as a comic clown, 'windbag, poseur, egotist' (*Re-Enter* 109) with 'pomposities' that are 'well known' (*Enter* 142). During his investigative sojourn in Wales, away from the protection of the ivory-tower West-End theatre, he appears naïve, humiliated, his stature reduced. His anguished request for 'a cocktail and early dinner [. . .] at the Red Lion' (174), is firmly overruled by Markham, whose insistence on practicality, 'a sandwich while we talk to the proprietor' instead (176), is more effective, and at the end of a day of role-reversal, trudging after his sprightly assistant, who takes the lead and proves the more energetic sleuth, Saumarez's 'feet were red-hot in his shoes, and his bannerlike smile but a faded tatter of itself' (175). After a few nights at Mrs Mitcham's uncomfortable lodging house, 'there was no more spirit in him' (173) and his ego is deflated the more it becomes clear that in this backwater, he must perform without 'having his entrance worked up for him' (177). He comes to realise that in the eyes of ordinary people outside the thespian community actors are esteemed 'no more than the unpaid versatile acrobats of the zoo' (282).

In *Re-enter Sir John* he cuts an effeminate figure: Mrs Lake is a lower-class woman with whom he is barely acquainted, but when he discovers that she has been murdered, he drops the mask of his performed identity and is 'more shaken by the news than he cared to admit' (98); on witnessing his visible distress, Sir George admonishes him for behaving like a 'tender hearted sentimentalist' (100), a charge which 'stung him because he knew it to be true' (*ibid.*). The generic trope of the detached 'baffled detective' (*ibid.*) is undermined by his demonstrative reactions, and cutting against the golden-age notion of the detective story as an intellectual puzzle, the trilogy appeals to a female readership welcoming inter-war reconfigurations of gender role. The instability of Saumarez's

masculine identity which causes him during the course of his investigation to 'not feel sure of himself any more' (*Enter* 211), is compounded and perhaps generated by emotional stress associated with First-World-War combat fatigue. *Printers Devil* is even more radical, eliminating the detective lead character altogether. Before the war a successful man, in its aftermath James Savory is 'ex-don, ex-officer, ex-author', psychologically damaged with ruined prospects compounded by economic downturn and a lack of political will to help integrate veterans back into society. He is 'washed up in London high and dry by the war, without a foot, a family, or a future [. . .] like many too much ill-treated dogs' (35). Finding refuge in Horrie's employment, his sleuthing skills are overlooked by the other characters, who regard him as an insignificant minor employee on the psychological scrap heap. During the dinner party when he comes to a sudden realisation that Marmion is the murderer, the other guests interpret his brilliant but emotional epiphany as a bad turn brought on by shell-shock. One of them remarks, 'they say no man who was through the war can be considered altogether normal. They're always liable to do odd things. Always subject to odd attacks' (272). When Savory goes on to prove Marmion's guilt, he surprises characters and readers alike. In a post-war zeitgeist characterised by a 'sometimes agonised sense of English manliness', generating a 'quest for a bearable masculinity' (Light 72 73), female golden-age writers including the 'Queens' (7) were all involved in a "feminizing" of male authority myths' (Munt 6), modifying their detective heroes despite their formidable perfections into modes of behaviour which were more womanish than that of their nineteenth-century forebears. Marsh self-consciously departs from normative masculinity, deliberately making Alleyn feel 'incomplete' when apart from Troy ('Introduction: Portrait of Troy' xi) to differentiate his soul from Holmes' 'cold, precise, but admirably balanced mind' (x). In Wimsey, Sayers creates a detective who is 'both shell-shocked and heroic' (Freedman 373) in defiance of a widespread inter-war distrust of emotionally damaged war veterans. In *Busman's Honeymoon*, he suffers an emotional collapse when he connects his part in the legalised murder of the criminals he has brought to justice with the legitimised atrocities he was made to commit in the war. Breaking down like a baby the night before an execution, Harriet 'held him, crouched at her knees, against her breast, huddling his head in her arms' (451). In *The Longer Bodies* (1930), Gladys Mitchell creates a war-damaged Inspector Bloxam, educated, gifted, and destined for Sandhurst and a military career before the war 'stepped in', leaving him 'extraordinarily tired' and only fit for the 'noble' but non-prestigious police force (109), and in *Traitor's Purse*, an assault on Campion during an investigation generates amnesia and mental confusion reminiscent of shell-shock, and this decimates his customary masculine autonomy, prowess and confidence. Until the close of the novel when he regains his

memory and his manhood, like Wimsey, he is heavily dependent on his wife's emotional and physical support.

Shaped by popular psychological theories, a cultural consensus emerged in the inter-war period that mental health and lawless behaviour were somehow connected, that 'criminality [was] more complex and nuanced than the unambiguous language of law can express' and 'a unique combination of circumstances acting upon individual psychology, environment, conditions and moral life could with a significant trigger turn anyone into a murderer' (Walton 18, 67). Accordingly, in golden-age women's writing, 'realism and social commentary' is consequently brought to bear on narrative treatments of suspect as well as detective (Munt 7) and Dane and Simpson duly create a sympathetic murderer out of a shell-shock victim. They are alone in this regard, however. After claiming that Sayers pioneers 'the new concept of the criminal as a complex figure rather than [. . .] a symbol of evil' (40), Connolly admits that she 'does not quite reach the "whydunnit"' (40), that in her work and in that of her contemporaries villainy is more usually represented as an amorphous and collective notion. Vane and Wimsey are the only multifarious characters in her fiction and the motives of villains are largely unexplored. In *Gaudy Night* (1935), although Annie Wilson's attempted murder of the woman professor who she believes drove her husband to suicide is motivated by social and cultural factors – her economic dependency on men and resentment of career women – these are vague and generalised and her impassioned confession does not excuse her from narrative censure. Wimsey's concern about the fate of the condemned man he brought to conviction in *Busman's Honeymoon* is a measure of his own qualities of conscience, responsibility and sensitivity, and the reader is not invited to try to understand the villain. Allingham's criminals are regularly the mindless dupes of corrupt corporate or communist-style groups working to undermine the establishment, and irrespective of the fact that by committing perjury and murder, Gladys Mitchell's Mrs Bradley sets a precedent for later narratives in which 'the anti-heroic detective can sometimes not be easily distinguished from the criminal' (Rowland 21), her actions are eccentric, bizarre and devoid of psychological anguish. In contrast, in *Enter Sir John*, Dane and Simpson deconstruct hegemonic vilifications of criminality, adopting a 'whydunnit' approach which significantly antedates by at least ten years the beginnings of the literary shift from the more simplistic 'howdunnit' and 'whodunnit' to this more sophisticated detective model. At the forefront of a transition towards psychological analyses of criminality, they give narrative space over to Fane's woeful back-story and dissolve the normative boundary between evil criminal and heroic detective by cultivating affinities and similarities between them. Saumarez and Fane are both in love with Martella, the deserving heroine; they also share the experience of shell shock and an enthusiasm for and proficiency in performing in Shakespearean productions. Saumarez recognises

that before Fane's acting aspirations were devastated by shell-shock-generated stage fright, he was, 'outwardly, at least . . . his match' (*Enter* 235), and Markham, a reliable witness, testifies that:

Everybody liked Fane, Sir. You couldn't not. A bit soft, but that was the war. They say he was a good actor before the war. Started in a circus as a kid and had worked his way up to Number One Tours and occasional London. Small part and understudied lead. 'Hamlet' and 'The Third Floor Back' – that sort of part. Lost his nerve in the last offensive. Funked London when he got back. [. . .] He came to us to cure himself, with plenty of first nights and quick studies.

(162–3)

Work ethic and theatre professionalism as the nexus between Fane and Sir John is not the only factor which inclines the reader to sympathise with the culprit's fall from grace. The novel makes a strong case that Fane's transgression is caused not only by war trauma but also by another intolerable cultural condition. Fane is a 'half-caste – a Eurasion [sic]' (*Enter* 222), and it is his experience of multiple prejudice – against war-generated mental illness and his poverty and race – which drives him to murder. Magda blackmails him with her knowledge that he is consumed by an agonised racial sensitivity, a desperate hope that Martella may have mistaken him for a dark-skinned European and a fear that she will reject him if she knows his true ethnic origins. Reneging on her part in their financial arrangement, Madala reveals his secret to Martella, heaping racial taunts upon him in the process which he is unable to withstand. Confessing to the murder, Fane tells how 'she called me a black beast. She called me a murdering nigger. I stopped her screaming then [. . .] She didn't scream again' (254). Saumarez understands that combat-trauma is responsible for a situation in which 'his temper had [. . .] mastered him so completely and [. . .] his nerve had broken at the sound of a woman's voice in anger' (280), but what he fails to comprehend is the effect that racism has had on his mental health.

If golden-age women's writing revealed a 'tension with a constant pre-occupation of twentieth-century Britain: race and the legacy of colonisation' (Rowland 62), by eschewing racist rhetoric in their narrative and indicating that racial tension and prejudice are motivational factors in Fane's crime, Dane and Simpson's standpoint marks a liberal divergence from the naivety and conservatism which determine treatments of race by many other female writers at the time. These were known to endow their fiction with the same 'racialist flavour' (Watson 123) as their male counterparts, and to subscribe to the same ideology as 'writers of the more sedate detective stories' who nevertheless 'devoted some of their talents to remarkably splenetic portraiture of characters with dark complexions or guttural accents' (*ibid.*). Mitchell is an exception;

Mrs Bradley is a racially tolerant detective who asserts 'it is not my custom to handicap my mental powers with a mass of prejudices and preconceived ideas' (*Longer* 180). She carries a liberal narrative perspective which is the antithesis of the boorish Sergeant's 'usual English implication that foreigners are always either lunatics or criminals or both' (94) and the superintendent's unimaginative 'truly "roast-beef" sentiment' that 'I don't like these foreigners! There's always something fishy going on when they're about' (124). Yet her broad-mindedness is perhaps less startling than Dane and Simpson's, because her foreign characters tend to be North-European whereas Fane is Indian in origin. Christie is also relatively progressive in her privileging of Poirot over his often obtuse English sidekick, Hastings, but again he is white-European, and as Light points out, she generally fails to 'challenge the xenophobic statements of her characters [. . .] sitting rather firmly on the fence' (84). Allingham's work is characterised by a patriotism deeply rooted in racist ideology. In *Sweet Danger*, the tale of a small, contested oil-rich Adriatic state, Campion's mission is to outwit the false claimants, a group of financiers who pose a threat to the fabric of England, and restore its sovereignty to its ostensibly rightful inevitably British heirs and gentry-in waiting: Amanda Fitton and her family, even though it is their aristocratic ancestors who seized the island from its indigenous peoples in the first place. Allingham is unfazed by her colonial agenda, her endorsement of the Fittons' claim. Campion's accomplices comprise British establishment figures, Sir Henry, motivated by a narratively endorsed 'streak of unconscious patriotism', and imperialist-identified Colonel Featherstone, whose 'bright pink face and voluminous white moustache' are 'emblems of peace and security' (240). When they arrange for the British army to come to his aid, Campion 'glanced at their khaki uniforms and was thankful and comforted [. . .] grateful for such assurance' (*ibid.*), and his anxious fear of the ennui and pessimism of modern culture is calmed in *Traitor's Purse* by his underlying confidence in his cultural regressiveness: 'a spiritual and romantic faith [which] had been there always [. . .] a deep and lovely passion for his home, his soil, his blessed England, his principles, his breed, his Amanda and Amanda's future children' (116). Marsh's Alleyn is also somewhat xenophobic. In *Artists in Crime*, returning from a crime investigation in the South Pacific, he asks his mother in jest, 'would you have been delighted to welcome a strapping black Fijian lady? I might have got one to regard me with favour at Suva, perhaps, but they smell of coconut oil, which you would not have found particularly delicious' (471), and in 1935 novel, *Nursing Home Murder*, he describes his 'great-aunt who left all her money to a muffin-man with coloured blood' as 'undoubtedly bats' (549). Inspector Fox, who Marsh describes as 'calm and plain thinking' ('Introduction: Roderick' 7), finds in the dissolute behaviour of the bohemian painters who work with Troy at Tatler's End, 'not much difference between their ways and the sort of folk we used to

deal with down in the black divisions' (*Artists* 558). According to Watson, Sayers was persistently anti-Semitic and 'not even Victor Gollancz', son of a Jewish rabbi, a man of international sympathies and a declared champion of minorities, 'seems to have thought of trying to restrain [her] from the snide remarks which she was always slipping into the detective stories that [he] published' (131).

Notwithstanding Dane and Simpson's progressive outlook on their Asian-identified protagonist, they are guilty of concurring with the racist golden-age convention whereby 'foreign was synonymous with criminal in nine novels out of ten' (Watson 123) and their representation of ethnic otherness is complicated by Saumarez's racial superiority. Although Fane's actions are judged as forgivable, he is not a heroic figure and there is never the faintest possibility that he will get his girl. Allowing Martella to take the blame for Magda's death is a mark of his dishonour which throws Saumarez's oppositional moral integrity into sharp relief. The right behaviour of the Englishman who states, 'I don't think I would save my own skin at a woman's expense' (*Enter* 252) is contrasted with Fane's exotic cowardice. Yet Fane's impassioned confession suggests that the writers recognise that Englishness is a cultural construct, not a biological given:

You say to me, steady' – Handell Fane's voice was shrill – 'control myself, eh? Keep a stiff upper lip – British phlegm – public school tradition! White man's burden. Keep the flag flying and all the rest of it! Steady – even when you've murdered and are caught! Very proper and all that. But I'm not white.

(251)

Although Fane's outburst exhibits a belief that his racial inferiority renders him unable to act according to a superior British gentlemanly moral code, 'I'm not white' suggests that he has been prevented from becoming a gentleman by racial discrimination, and his mocking of colonial platitudes points to some uncomfortable truths about imperialism. By suggesting that he has been criminalised by society's prejudice and neglect, the novel parallels Dane's sympathetic representation of Ralph Samuels in *The Babyons* and anticipates contemporary feminist identifications with racial minorities. Furthermore, the novel's truth bearers hold no truck with racism. Saumarez responds admiringly to the local police sergeant's 'tolerant' comment, immigrants 'don't know our ways and they don't like 'em. You can't blame them for it', by remarking how he would like to 'send my young actors here to you, to study the objective outlook' (281). Martella is aware of Fane's ethnicity all along, but this does not compromise her strong feelings of friendship towards him and she is prepared to face the gallows rather than reveal his secret. Her gesture is

extreme, certainly, but it does serve to associate her exceptionalism and heroism with racial tolerance, so challenging the prejudices of the reader and the reactionary values of the genre.

In a radical departure from the normative crime-narrative outcome of imprisonment or the death penalty, *Enter Sir John* advocates clemency, orchestrating Fane's escape from captivity and survival. After his getaway, Scotland Yard's appropriately named Major Traill remarks, 'well, speaking unprofessionally I'm not sorry' (291), articulating the narrative standpoint, unrepentant on two accounts: because Fane's appalling treatment as a war veteran and immigrant have created mitigating circumstances, and because the writers will not see anyone hang and are prepared to derail the patriarchal legal system to prevent this. Dane's contemporaries demonstrate the same aversion to capital punishment. According to Marsh, Alleyn 'would be one of' those 'in the force that were for abolition' of capital punishment ('Introduction: Portrait' x) and Sayers wrote that condemning fictional villains to the gallows 'must not be done too lightheartedly' (Introduction. *Great Stories* 38). The hanging of the villain in *Busman's Honeymoon* has to be justified by alienating him from the reader on account of his dangerous working class envy which makes him sick of 'truckling to a blasted title' and threatens Sayers' idealised established order (316) as well as his lack of remorse and masculine brutality, the antithesis of Wimsey's chivalry. Throwing down his girlfriend 'heavily upon the settle, bruising her, and knocking her hat grotesquely over one ear' is at one point ironically juxtaposed with Wimsey and Harriet's romantic and harmonious scene entrance, their 'two voices singing together softly' – in French! (318).⁸ In *Speedy Death*, Mrs Bradley arranges a 'mercy' killing of Eleanor partly to spare her the noose and in *The Longer Bodies*, Clive Brown-Jenkins, like many of Christie's less heinous murderers, commits suicide before he can be brought to trial. When his sister and accomplice, Amaris, flees to America to escape justice, reflective of Mitchell's own opposition to capital punishment, Inspector Bloxham is satisfied with this outcome on account of the fact that she 'did nothing except try and keep her wretched brother out of taking the consequences of his crimes' (327). Mitchell's fugitive is only an accessory to murder, however; by sanctioning Fane's escape and subjecting him to a sympathetic cultural and psychological analysis, Dane and Simpson are the more subversive, and their novel signals their more progressive views on race and class. If pulling detective fiction away from the predictable and towards a more psychological and social exploration of crime whereby 'the identity of the culprit is a matter of sociological significance, not just the bare solution to a puzzle' (Craig and Cadogan qtd. in Young 93) is a notable mark of 'women's concerns' in detective writing (Coward and Semple 54), Fane's struggle with dominant culture situates *Enter Sir John* firmly within feminist discourse.

Investigative Women

The fact that Jane Marple and Harriet Vane are as well-known as Hercule Poirot and Peter Wimsey might suggest that Christie and Sayers can be credited with breaking the rules by creating dominant female detectives for the first time in the history of the crime genre. Yet as a genteel conservative elderly woman, Marple poses little threat to the patriarchal status quo and although a famous writer of detective fiction and a successful working woman, Vane has limited detective faculties and is never really more than an assistant to Wimsey. In *Have His Carcase* (1932) and *Gaudy Night* she is unable to make much headway in her investigation without Peter, her deductive processes pale before his superior intellect, and her capacity to concentrate on the cases in hand becomes increasingly compromised over the course of the Wimsey-Vane novels by her romantic feelings for him. Wimsey suffers no such internal conflict; although he reciprocates her feelings, he is well able to keep his mind on the job. Amanda Fitton and Agatha Troy are even less engaged in crime-solving; their primary role is to support their male detective-partners. Indeed, in a genre 'fairly rigidly defined according to a masculinist model' (Reddy 5), with a few exceptions, its patriarchal premises were uncontested in female-authored golden-age fiction. Although its female co-sleuths made intellectual contributions surpassing Dr Watson's offerings, they were generally 'subordinate' (Rowland 22), more often minor characters than detectives, and where they featured more prominently, they were generally passive and without agency, only required to 'react to primary characters – men' (Munt 4). Tuppence Beresford is an exception perhaps, and in *Murder at the Links* (1923), Christie features 'Cinderella', a 'boy- girl, the antithesis of traditional female sexuality [. . .] the plucky girl-assistant [who] conforms to the thoroughly modern template of the flapper' (Plain 43). Yet she is given only a small part in the narrative. A majorly integral female detective does exist, in the works of Gladys Mitchell, a 'consciously feminist' golden-age female writer (Knight 103), whose gender-progressive detective writing has largely been ignored.⁹ Her eccentric spinster-sleuth, Mrs Bradley, is one of the few fictional female detectives in their own right in this period. Like Marple she is brilliant and effective, yet the antithesis of Christie's inoffensive and culturally reassuring old maid. She luxuriates in her defiant performances of gender deviancy. In *Speedy Death*, she delights in engaging in domestic sabotage in order to murder Eleanor, employing a 'humble fish-slice' to move objects around without touching them and leaving fingerprints (322), and in *The Longer Bodies*, she forays into the public sphere in battle clothing of flamboyant colours, of 'indecent hue', accessorised with a hat-feather, an aggressive and empowering phallic symbol that 'shot insolently into the air for a matter of twenty inches or so', which she once used to direct the traffic (205)! Indeed, Mrs Bradley is pervasively associated with

phallic symbols. During a visit to the ubiquitous local village fair, she is 'brilliant at darts [. . .] flinging them one after another as quickly as she could' and marking 'her chosen target with a capital B, a *tour de force* which was applauded wildly by the onlookers' (199), and this echoes the strategy of Du Maurier's *Rebecca*, who also violently inscribes her identity-affirming initials to assert her power. Bradley caps her performance with an announcement which reveals a dangerous, bizarre and menacing eccentricity: 'that she was liable to fits of extreme absentmindedness owing to having been dropped on her head at the age of two months and three days, and was never certain where she would begin hurling the darts next' (199). She completely overpowers her effete male companion, who only 'scored the minimum number for the purpose', and is primarily concerned with choosing his appropriately unmanly prize: 'in deciding whether a green or a canary-coloured Fluffy Hussy should be his boon companion for the day' (ibid.). The events at the fair fulfil the narrative purpose of exposing the inadequacy of fixed gender positions and are mirrored by a sporting competition at Lady Puddequet's country house, designed to test the virility of her nephews. Again, the men's performance is ludicrously non-athletic, while Puddequet's nieces, excluded from the tournament on sex grounds, prove themselves physically and mentally more capable, in the arena of the real world.

Bradley's powerful female mind is culturally incompatible with hegemonic assumptions that investigative expertise is a masculine quality. A creative thinker, she employs feminine intuition and imagination to solve crime puzzles and her unconventional investigative methods challenge patriarchal assumptions, prejudices and superstitions about women and the female arts. Deconstructing that logocentric knowledge, valued by Van Dine and his male rule-writing peers, she dismisses 'facts' in favour of 'feelings' (*Speedy* 54) and holds in contempt the patriarchal institutions of law and medicine and the limited investigation methodologies of the constabulary. She calls policemen 'persons of some common sense [. . .] but usually of no imagination or sensitiveness whatsoever' (54); one in particular reminds her of 'the staff officer during the war who said the position of the front-line trenches was wrong because it did not agree with his map' (*Longer* 325). She exposes the hysteria of patriarchal thinking. With a tendency to 'hoot [with] mirth [. . .] like an Irish banshee' (238) and cackle like a witch (*Speedy* 73), when one male protagonist asks her if she is a witch, she comes back with an ironic rejoinder: 'no, merely a fairly observant human being' (57) and her female-identified psychic skills, her 'uncanny trick of reading minds' (259) cause consternation among her puzzled and intimidated male acquaintance. Her repudiations of traditional feminine behaviour and exhibitions of superior intellect and imagination generate a hostility from the police which she relishes, laughing when she declares, 'how they hate me [. . .]!' (179). Their resentment of her encroachment upon their domain far

surpasses the mild irritation they feel about Marple's gentle interferences. Yet she is held in high esteem by discerning Inspector Bloxam and many of the women she supports in the course of her investigations, and their admiration provides a moral touchstone to direct the reader to favour her too. Bradley is proud of her bond with women, how 'very few young men really appreciate me [. . .] their sisters usually judge to be far better judges of character than they are' (*Longer* 322). Myra Caddick comes to value her for using her knowledge of psychology to distract her from her terror that she will be the next murder victim, by castigating her for sucking a bull's eye during their interview with the result that the young witness 'hastily bolted the striped sweetmeat [and] completely forgot her nervousness (which forgetting happened to be the very object of Mrs Bradley's otherwise tactless remark)' (225). Caddick meets 'Mrs Bradley's encouraging grin with gratitude and forg[ets] her former animosity towards the shrivelled, yellow-clawed old lady' (248) by the end of the novel.

Suggesting that Mitchell represents Mrs Bradley as a model of alternative female behaviour does not imply that her novels are not vexed in their general attitude towards non-compliant women. The Queens of Crime have been accused of pathologising women, blaming their sexuality for their moral and legal transgressions and infusing their work with 'repressed single women' villains with 'hidden desires manifested in sexual violence' (Hoffman 8 166 Rowland 161) and despite Bradley's feminine intuition, she vehemently misuses masculine-identified 'applied psychology' (*Speedy* 73). Submitting Elinor to a period of intense surveillance, she becomes 'intensely interested in her psychological make-up' (168), diagnoses madness and regulates her mental health in the phallogocentric-style which Michel Foucault calls to account in *The History of Madness*. Her troubled suspect is vilified as a 'homocidal maniac' (218), whose utterances of desperation are interpreted as 'the most foul and abominable filth which ever disgraced the name of language' (224). This perspective is endorsed by narrative spokesman, Bertie, who regards Bradley's decision to take extreme punitive measures to rid society of Elinor's contaminating presence by taking matters into her own hands and ending her life in the spirit of a mercy killing as the act of 'a benefactor of the human race' (317). *Jane Eyre's* self-righteous negative configuration of Bertha Rochester springs to mind here. Furthermore, Bradley manifests an underlying viciousness from time to time which calls into question her heroism and status as a role model for modern women. She is prone to ambiguous declarations which can be construed as cynical and malicious. Her ostensibly altruistic suggestion that going to the fair will do everyone 'a world of good' (*Longer* 193), is undercut by her 'little scream of hideous laughter' (*ibid.*), just one of many occasions where she appears to enjoy manipulating situations to increase tension and conflict. Moreover, Mitchell's feminism can be called into question on account of a pervading narrative anxiety in her novels about feminine beauty which borders on

obsessive. She calls attention to the fact that Eleanor's dressing gown 'did little towards improving her extraordinary plain appearance' (*Speedy* 152), and describes a fortune teller at the fair as a 'coarsely good-looking girl' (*Longer* 196). She calls attention to Bradley's 'shrivelled little human macaw' (*Speedy* 319) and 'reptilian' (138) visage and her obsession is shared with her detective, whose own lack of body confidence make her wistfully envious of Bertie's youthful form, leading her to exclaim, 'how I wish I looked like that when I felt abashed! [. . .] how sweet that boy looks' (137). Characters are persistently over-defined by their physical appearance.

Dane and Simpson's work, on the other hand, rejects structural pressures to criminalise women and in a genre restricted not just by formal requirements but also by the conservative influence of audience expectation and the real world where there were no women detectives to provide a model (Klein, Munt and Reddy),¹⁰ they open up possibilities of liberal and feminist positions in this respect by conceptualising the female detective working independently of men. *Re-enter Sir John* and Dane's chapters in *The Scoop* are driven by Jill and Beryl Blackwood respectively, female investigators who combine Mrs Bradley's agency with greater integrity and emotional stability. They are also in the feminist vanguard in relation to the dates when they appear in print. Both precede earlier heroines, Troy, who first features in *Artists in Crime*, and Fitton, who makes her first appearance in *Sweet Danger*. Like 'Cinderella', they are young, active, adventurous, and feisty. Jill is a bright, tough newspaper reporter whose job entails plaguing politicians and celebrities for interviews and visiting the sites of crimes and accidents. The epitome of modern, mobile, resilient womanhood, she debuts in the novel after 'she had early been sent off to the scene of a train smash' (35). Engrossed in a new activity, 'celebrated in magazines in the inter-war period' as a signifier of the 'quintessentially modern' (Tinkler and Warsh 113), she is 'peacefully smoking, stuff telephoned, duty done, by the side of a lorry-driver who had offered her a lift to London' (*Re-Enter* 35). Although her undaunted approach to hitchhiking and scenes of wreckage and death does not differentiate her from Vane, her assumption of a traditional male role after Peter's disappearance does. Leading the operation to rescue and exonerate him, she competes with Sir John for textual importance, sometimes pushing him from his central position as the locus of investigative power and integrity. Convention is discarded to create an alliance between patriarch and modern woman which crosses class and gender-boundaries, and she is Saumarez's equal in courage and spirit; to his 'raging lion' (40), she pits her 'lion-taming eye' (14). Significantly, they are not economically matched, however. Notwithstanding his humble beginnings, the lifestyle of the powerful titled patriarch is privileged and increasingly indolent and pampered, and this is juxtapositioned with the meagre existence of the poor female

journalist, defined by hard work, resilience and proud independence, a 'gay miracle-worker, denizen of rooms where one does for oneself in preference to being done', who 'watched with interest the amount of actual man-power it took to get Sir John under way' (67). Her problems are compounded by the cultural reception of her modern identity. In *Enter Sir John*, Martella is universally regarded as a lady on account of the obvious markers of her 'breeding' (76): her refined accent and standard dialect, and Vane, Fitton and Troy are socially acceptable for the same reasons. The combination of Jill's investigative role and lower-middle-class 'London sparrow quality' on the other hand (*Re-Enter* 70), makes her harder for the other characters to place. Mrs Lake, who classifies geographically mobile unmarried women as either 'real ladies or hussies' (*ibid.*), is confused that Jill falls into neither category and concludes that, being neither well-bred, nor married, she must be less-than-respectable. Jill's new type, it seems, is in the forefront of a troubling not-yet culturally acceptable modernity. In fact, for all her modern values, she internalises hegemonic values and her confidence wavers during moments when she doubts the validity of her self-negotiated gender role. She is sometimes tempted to perform femininity in order to keep her boyfriend's affections: 'she did not want to be brisk and efficient with Peter. She wanted to be marvellous, and languorous and calm, to do a little clinging for once, and stop being too clever by half' (20). Fortunately, dissembling is not necessary. Peter is a post-war effeminate, the antithesis of the patriarchal English hero, 'not much more than a boy', who on one occasion breaks down into a 'dry passion of sobbing' (61). He stands for a type of modern male who has no choice but to accommodate role reversal, which eases the continuation of Jill's career beyond the resolution of the detective plot. Like the opportune self-determination of Dane's other heroines, Jill's independence is facilitated by a historically contingent cultural feminisation of men.

Dane's input into *The Scoop* similarly illustrates her feminist commitment to the idea of a female sleuth. Although designed as an intellectual exercise, this narrative as a whole embeds a sub-textual debate about how gender should be represented within detective fiction. Central to this discourse is the place and performance of Beryl, a secretary working on *The Scoop* newspaper. With the turn of each writer, as a favoured character and preferred investigation methodology is pushed into prominent position, a battle is fought between male-author exponents of mechanical ingenuity and the traditional male sleuth and oppositional women guerrilla writers, Sayers, Dane and Agatha Christie, who use Beryl to attack the genre's phallocentric core. Beryl is introduced by Sayers in Chapter one, which opens with her receiving a call from one of the firm's reporters, Johnson, informing her that he has a story for the paper regarding a murder in Brighton which he is reporting there. When he is also murdered in Chapter two, Christie takes over the story, widening Beryl's

role from secretary to assistant amateur detective and teaming her with her reporter-boyfriend, Oliver, to investigate their colleague's death. In the following chapter, E.C. Bentley removes Beryl from the investigation, relegating her to a witness and establishing Oliver as the sole sleuth. In Chapter four, Christie restores the detective partnership, and in Chapter five, written by Antony Berkeley, again Beryl is erased and Oliver re-positioned at the centre of the investigation. In Chapter six, Freeman Wills Crofts eclipses Oliver's narrative authority by introducing establishment-figure, Chief Inspector Bradford of the Yard, but when Dane takes over in Chapter seven, she removes both men from the action and re-instates Beryl, making her the main sleuth. Although Sayers and Christie endeavour to provide Beryl with a piece of the action, Dane is more determined, and she draws her in marked contrast to generic middlebrow heroines trapped in patriarchal houses, providing her with a lifestyle which in some ways reflects Dane's own. A modern young woman, she enjoys her alternative domestic world living in a flat on her own, buys herself a dog and entertains guests on a modest budget, preparing the food herself. Bedsits and small flats are important tropes in alternative domestic narratives, and Beryl's modest domestic space signifies her independence, paralleling other fictional apartments where, daughters could 'cast off their role as angels of the house and revolt against the oppressiveness and totality of those large upper-middle-class houses and families firmly under the patriarchal thumb' (Briganti and Mezei 11). Furthermore, of an inter-war milieu in which 'women were achieving greater liberation as walkers and observers in [. . .] public spaces' (Parsons 6), Beryl shops, browses, and her detective expeditions see her like other modern London women 'wandering away from planned pathways to back streets' (15). Leisurously navigating, meandering with confidence, she belongs to 'a new stratum of single women, who learn their own circuits in the rounds of work and pleasure', who 'hide' in an ironically 'man-made space' (Parsons 82), 'deny voyeuristic objectification' and enjoy 'the exhilaration that the city can offer' (Parsons 227).¹¹

As the spiritual sister of Hetty, Antonina and Donna, she is also gifted with telepathic powers. Seeking the shop where the murder-weapon, a brooch, was purchased, she makes a clairvoyant connection with Johnson, who psychically guides her to the right road:

She said to herself: 'If I were a spiritualist now, I should say he were trying to get through to me'. And then, on an impulse, stood stock still in the deserted street – she could not see a yard ahead of her – and said to the wall of fog: 'All right. If he is anywhere and wants to tell me anything, let him try. I'm in the mood'. And stood, superstitiously waiting for some sort of an answer to come to her out of the filthy quiet.

(*Scoop* 64)

Although experiencing no actual ghostly manifestation, Beryl's intuition breaks Knox's stipulation for detective-fiction that 'all supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course' (qtd. Ousby 67) and Dane affords narrative credibility to the kind of spirituality which was typically dismissed by the genre's purists as feminine nonsense. Christie and Marsh also endow their detectives with connection, empathy or ethical feeling which sometimes operate as powerful investigative tools (Rowland 23). In *Have His Carcase*, Vane critiques the 'ritually revered formula, obsessed with timetables, maps, locked rooms, puzzles' which defines the genre (Munt 7) in favour of female intuition, which she regards as 'artistic sense', of more use as a detective tool than those 'figures and time-tables [. . .] all machine-made' (*Carcase* 339) which yield a hypothesis which 'cracks at every joint' (ibid.). Her scorn ultimately evaporates and the narrative re-privileges masculine codes, however, when Wimsey solves the case by means of the very logical tactics that Vane derides. Conversely, by advocating feminine sixth sense as more valid as a sleuthing attribute than oppositional male logic, Dane is more rebellious.¹²

Disappearing in Bentley's Chapter eight, although Beryl is restored by Berkeley to an investigative position in Chapter nine, this is only designed to demonstrate her feminine ineptitude. Uncovering a piece of crucial evidence, she unwittingly entrusts it to the villain, Hemingway, and when she realises her error, she capitulates to male authority myths, believing that her boyfriend and sleuthing partner 'would have done the placing so much more competently than herself; Oliver never lost his head' (*Scoop* 81). When Dane takes up the baton again in Chapter ten, she continues Berkeley's narrative thread, but from a feminist perspective, giving Beryl space to reflect on how easy it has been for her phallogentric employer to use his power to manipulate her into covering the truth, and how her integrity and regard for verity have also been compromised by her condescending boyfriend:

The more she thought over the interview with Hemingway the less pleased was she at the part which she had played. There was no use in deceiving herself. She might as well face it. She, a modern woman with a vote, a flat, a latch-key, views on life and literature, and an independent soul, had let herself be bullied. [. . .] She had been in the right: she had behaved with absolute correctness, yet that sour prig, that austere devil of correctness, Hemingway, had actually flustered her into a silly lie. Wasn't it monstrous?

The more she thought of that feeble lie the more annoyed, angry, furious she felt – annoyed with herself, angry with Hemingway, and really furious with Denis Oliver whose preoccupation with his own theories, whose refusal to consider her discovery important had led her to Hemingway. She saw now how unwise she had been. She should never have gone to Hemingway. But having gone she should

not have let herself be intimidated by Hemingway. Above all she should not have lied.

(89–90)

Beryl's fury perhaps resonates with Dane's own exasperation with 'the difficulties of locating female agency and voice in a society, and a genre, where agency is associated with maleness' (Kinsman 161). Having being unable to prevent Berkeley from reducing her feisty heroine to an incapable female stereotype, powerless to speak the truth, Dane allegorises the narrative violence done to the detective genre by her male co-contributors: at the end of her chapter she orchestrates a physical attack on Beryl by Hemmingway which knocks her out and prevents her from continuing her investigation. This symbolises women's forced silence not only in *The Scoop*, but in golden-age writing in general and in the wider cultural arena which reflected the genre's gender philosophy. Wills Croft then removes Beryl completely from the storyline, preventing her from regaining consciousness and resuming the investigation, which would be the usual next step for the male detective. Bradford is now the sole sleuth, and even Sayers surrenders her earlier interest in Beryl when she concludes the novel in the next chapter. Abiding by the patriarchal code instead, she repositions Oliver as the main point of interest and authority, leaving the female investigator nowhere to be seen. This coheres with the narrative structure and the ideology which underpins it in her Wimsey novels, where the male detective solves the crime and the status quo is reconfirmed.

Foregrounding the Woman's Plot

Knox and S. S. Vine believed that the detective novel should include 'no love interest, because through it [. . .] unity was damaged' (Symons 104), but as Klein contends, female-authored golden-age novels broke these structural rules and 'vacillated between' the 'investigation' and 'marriage plot' (Klein 107). Their wavering was ideological as well as structural; capitulations meant they were generally as guilty as male exponents of 'persistently undermining their protagonists by this pattern' (ibid.), they 'experimented with but finally rejected a standard of equality for women and men' (100) and re-inscribed the normative 'dichotomy between professional success and romantic fulfilment' (110), in a 'sequential pattern which [. . .] defines marriage as both women's life and their work' (114). A will to reconcile hegemonic beliefs that traditional roles within marriage should not really change with the new concept of the progressive companionate marriage generate narrative configurations whereby, as a novel or series of novels develops, women in romantic and sleuthing partnerships with men are gradually 'nudged beyond supporting roles to subservience' and 'the male detective figure assumes the role of the

dominant partner and the women are relegated to the position of glorified sidekick' (Hoffman 77 92). Fitton is promisingly modern when she is introduced in *Sweet Danger* but her modernity and independence are short-lived. Defined by 'jauntiness' and an adventuring spirit (147), she has a fervent interest in new technology – radios, electricity, gadgets – and enjoys racing around in her own car (147–8). In contrast to her sister, Mary, whose traditional name suits her 'old-world shyness . . . which enhanced her somewhat Edwardian beauty' (147), and who spends her 'morning devoted to household affairs with [. . .] sweet womanly abstraction' (179), Amanda's more modern name matches her androgynous behaviour. Introduced as dressed in ragged trousers, covered with lichen, hair wild and full of twigs, she escapes domesticity literally, by climbing out of a window after her brother locks her in the house, yet her acts of liminality generally work to dent her courage, and she is inclined to behave school-girlishly in the public world, subjected to attacks of feminine jitters. Accompanying Campion on one of his investigations, 'she plodded at his heels' like a little dog (204) and when she comes face to face with the villain, she 'stood trembling [. . .] almost paralysed with fear', before collapsing from an injury sustained in the melee, reducing her in Campion's eyes to a 'little fool!', a burden who has to be 'set her down gently' (233, 234). At the close of the text she proposes teaming up with Campion on future investigations, but because immediately after she makes the suggestion she falls asleep like a child, he does not take her ambition seriously (250). In *Traitor's Purse*, the second novel in which she features, she becomes infantilised and sexualised simultaneously. In Campion's amnesiac condition, she looks to him like a mere girl, a 'self-possessed sixteen-year-old' (188), someone 'half her age' whose 'short skirt showed her knees' (133). He sees her as perfect wife material; not fit enough to accompany him on his adventures (82), but valued as 'an oasis' of calm (125), suitably 'intelligent' to understand him and join in with his conversations, but not undesirably 'clever' with the term's inter-war connotations of wily shrewdness and subversive independent thoughts (52). She dedicates herself to his physical and emotional needs: running baths, finding him breakfast, organising his clothes (26, 80), taking care not to 'fuss' him because he 'hates' it (56), and her bringing the car round for him to take over the driving at the close of the novel symbolises the restoration of his memory, manliness and place as the dominant partner in their relationship (187). In *Coroner's Pidgin*, the last text in the series, she is reduced to mere waiting wife and new mother at the hearth and heart of the home to which Campion returns at the end of the Second World War. Featuring on the final page only, she comes full circle to be reinstated into the domestic world that she inhabited at the start of *Sweet Danger*. From a potentially modern woman in mucky working trousers, she is transformed into a model of domesticity, complete with a 'formal and a little old fashioned' dress (228).

Ultimate retirement from the public world is the fate of Christie's Tuppence Beresford too, who at the end of the novels in which she appears also refocuses her attention completely on motherhood. She bears a similitude to Amanda, and to Marsh's initially modern and independent female protagonists, who also come to engage in recurring performances of feminine helplessness as their stories develop and are eventually returned to positions of domesticity. Angela North, heroine of *A Man Lay Dead*, starts like Amanda, outwardly confident and androgynous. Driving guests to her Uncle Hubert's house party, 'she laughs like a small boy' (12), demonstrates 'extremely progressive ideas on acceleration' (ibid.), and asserts her power over her passenger, future sleuthing and romantic partner, Nigel, by teasing 'I hope I haven't completely unmanned you . . . by my driving' (13). Yet she admits 'I'm a careful driver really' (12) and this connotes her true traditionally domestic role. This is confirmed when they arrive at the big house and one of the guests apprises Nigel of the set-up there, whereby 'while Arthur has a paper to write for the British Ethnological conference, Doctor Tokareff spends his mornings in improving his vocabulary and [. . .] Angela housekeeps' for her Uncle Hubert (27). Subsequently her opinions are hedged and expressed without confidence: she comments: 'I sort of *think* Vassily did it, but I don't *feel* he did' (82). Her contribution to the murder investigation is her maternal skill, which she employs to gently coax a child witness who is too intimidated by the men to co-operate with their masculine interview techniques. Through the course of the narrative Bathgate prepares her for a feminine matrimonial role through his romantic patriarchal gestures, at one point carrying her across a stream even though she is perfectly happy to get wet and muddy. The reader might hope that she will be able to retain her very masculine taste for 'oceans and oceans of beer' (145) but when she reappears as Mrs. Bathgate in *The Nursing Home Murder*, although she is still smoking cigarettes (553), she is otherwise diminished, rebuked like a child by her husband for giggling inappropriately (576), and accused by Alleyn of possessing a sentimental 'movie-mind' (654), romantic, womanly, weepie. In later novels featuring Bathgate, she is only mentioned in passing, as the wife at home, having babies.

The fictional marriage of Alleyn and Troy, for which Marsh is better known, is similarly constructed according to a clear demarcation of roles, and this is a self-conscious authorial decision. Marsh describes her fictional couple as 'a married investigator [and] his celebrated wife' and explains how, 'by a series of coincidences and much against his inclination, it would come about that these two would occasionally get themselves embroiled in his professional duties, but generally speaking he would keep his job out of his family life. He would set about his cases with his regular associate, who is one of his closest friends; Inspector Fox' ('Introduction: Roderick' 7). Indeed, for all Troy's cigarette smoking, short hair and art-career independence, her painting is for pleasure

rather than out of economic necessity and she ultimately becomes more of a romantic nineteenth-century throwback than a modern wife. A Victorian model of physical delicacy and squeamishness, she is 'sensitive as a sea urchin', 'reticent', 'shy' (Marsh 'Introduction: Portrait' xi), and during the courtship in *Artists in Crime*, she is in constant need of Alleyn's protection and support. Unnerved by the murder investigation which takes place at her house, 'she lost her balance. Alleyn put his arm out quickly. For a moment he supported her. [. . .] Her hand was on his shoulder. He held her firmly by the arms' (610). Her feminine weakness allures him: when 'he saw her face, marred by tears, he wanted almost overwhelmingly to kiss it' (633). As their romance begins to flourish in *Death in a White Tie*, her childlike embarrassment, modesty, quiverings, wavering voice and nervous movements boost Alleyn's sense of sexual dominance (261-5), and awash with the traditional sentimentality which Dane's comment to Heinemann about her choice of ending for *First the Blade* reveals she was determined to avoid (Barrow 23), the novel ends as Alleyn 'took her in his arms' (290). Writing about Troy, Marsh imagines her explaining how she wishes to spare her husband any trouble on her behalf because, 'I married him and I would be a very boring wife if I spent half my time wincing and showing sensitive' ('Introduction: Portrait' xi). Irrespective of Alleyn's certainty that the 'domestic picture' that absorbs his mind when he envisions his future marriage is unlikely to equate to reality, that when he returns home after work every day, she will more likely be busy working on her painting and thinking more of her art than of him, in actuality, once their relationship becomes established, her customary quotidian occupation is waiting for him on the floor by the fireside, and little serious painting is accomplished (*Death in a White Tie* 202, *Death and the Dancing* 480). Furthermore, although Marsh intended that Troy's art would continue to be respected in a marriage in which 'neither impinges upon the other's work without being asked' ('Introduction: Portrait' xi), the giving and receiving of advice is not reciprocal. While Alleyn feels reassured that 'there is nobody in the world who can listen as you can' (*Death in a White Tie* 77), he acts solely on his own inclinations and instincts while Troy is in constant need of his opinion on her work, and Marsh appears to relish the fact that following mild and ineffectual protests made against his criticisms of her art, Troy always acknowledges he knows best and follows his advice: she 'sometimes gets argumentative and uptight over the answer and almost always ends up by following the suggestion' ('Introduction: Portrait' xi). Ominously, as she embarks on matrimony in *Death and the Dancing Footman*, she is no longer introduced in Marsh's customary signature list of supporting 'Cast of Characters' as 'An Artist' as in previous novels, but as 'his wife'. In this novel, she never moves outside the private sphere, the rectory where the Alleyns are staying and where she paints the rector, and when Alleyn prepares to embark on his sleuthing adventure, she sets

her easel aside to run through his physical needs in her mind – ‘pyjamas, dressing-gown, shaving things’ – and see to his packing (481). When she apologises that she is ‘a rotten packer’, he replies ‘almost you qualify for the role of clever little wife’ (ibid.). Her art is now just an old-fashioned womanly Victorian accomplishment divorced from career or economic impetus and there is no longer any pretense that she paints for a living.

Sayers is more famous for her New Woman disposition to make ‘a female’s negotiation of gender [. . .] of equal importance, and often bound up with, the mystery’ (Young 42). In her ‘Introduction’ to *Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror*, she welcomes a new stage in detective writing, ‘the modern method’ of fleshing characters out into ‘figures having more in common with humanity’ (41), a future genre in which ‘a new and less rigid formula will probably have developed, linking it more closely to the novel of manners and separating it more widely from the novel of adventure’ (44). This innovation forms the structural foundation of her Wimsey-Vane quintet, *Strong Poison*, *Gaudy Night*, *Busman’s Honeymoon*, *The Haunted Policeman* (1939) and *Talboys* (1942). These novels ‘inaugurated a new direction in the field’ by blending ‘the two genres of crime and romance together’ (Munt 10), investing the sleuths’ romance with as much importance as the crime investigation. She foregrounds this by titling *Busman’s Honeymoon*, ‘a love story with detective interruptions’ and by following its crime resolution with a three-chapter ‘Epithalamion’ which clears up problematic elements of the equally or perhaps more significant personal narrative. Yet ‘opposing the static unreality of the “pure” detective world’ (Wald qtd. Munt 10) here manifests not as a plot of female independence but as a vexed story about a fundamentally unequal and traditional romantic relationship. Focussing on Wimsey’s troubled psychology, the epithalamion also charts Harriet’s ‘successful’ struggle to curb her possessive inclinations in order to make a good marriage. Gender inequities around role, function and interest are inscribed in the Vane and Wimsey novels as a whole, forcefully demonstrated in *Have His Carcase* in an epiphanic moment which anticipates Vane’s ultimate subordination: she

suddenly saw Wimsey in a new light. She knew him to be intelligent, clean, courteous, wealthy, well-read, amusing and enamoured, but he had not so far produced in her that crushing sense of utter inferiority which leads to prostration and hero-worship. But she now realised that there was, after all, something godlike about him.
(213–4)

By *Busman’s Honeymoon*, her adoration has become endemic and her detective role has dwindled. Wimsey clearly regards her a mediocre investigator; struggling with the howdunnit of the case, he ‘picked out Harriet from the rest [. . .] as though propounding a problem to the

brightest-looking of a not-too-hopeful class' (391), and as he prepares to set a trap for the murderer, he turns to his right hand man, declaring 'Bunter – [. . .] I shall want you', addressing Harriet 'as though she had been his footman' (394). There is little mention now of her career, the conflict between womanliness and academia which was dramatised in *Gaudy Night* has been forgotten, and her main concern by the end of the novel is that she has not 'failed altogether' as a wife (447–8). Her romantic capitulation is witnessed by Mrs Ruddle, who observes that 'she worships the ground 'e treads on' (304) and Wimsey, who refers approvingly to her 'alarming plunge into wifeliness' (142). She is increasingly solicitous for his comfort, supervising the move to and from Talboys cottage, shielding him from the press, organising the daily help and working with Bunter to ensure that he is always able to get on with the case, free from unsettling distractions. She also becomes utterly economically dependent upon him, revealing cheerfully to him near the close of the narrative that 'at the moment I haven't got a penny in the world except what's yours' (294). In *The Haunted Policeman* she is preoccupied with her new baby and in her final appearance in *Talboys* she juggles writing and motherhood to the complete exclusion of investigative work, while Wimsey solves the case without her, aided by their now six-year-old son. Young's contention that 'Sayers championed a world where human beings could exist free of the constraints of gender' (43) is contestable to say the least.

In *Enter Sir John*, the narrative is also dived between the murder investigation and the heroine's negotiations with modern womanhood, but Martella's story inhabits greater space and the novel is less marriage-obsessed than the plots of Sayers, Marsh and Allingham, more fully dispenses with Van Dine's masculinist rule stipulating 'no long descriptive passages, no literary dallying with side-issues, no subtly worked-out character analyses' (qtd. Brauer 3), and is notably more radically disruptive of generic and ideological convention. While Vane is 'mostly [. . .] a device to develop Lord Wimsey's character' (Reddy 22), Martella is equally important as Saumarez as the centre of narrative interest and the purveyor of truth values and by incorporating middlebrow features influenced by the novel-of-manners, the novel fully honours women's identity. It rejects the technical cleverness of the detection plot some years before the early forties when this became a generic shift of interest. At this time, a 'weariness with mechanical ingenuity' developed (Symons 117), 'almost all' crime writers 'recognised a need for some form of realism, either character-based or contextual, or frequently both' (Knight 136). It predates texts by female detective authors who began writing female plots following the Second World War (Munt 14), rejecting 'the masculine critical tradition', and 'formal rules of detective fiction' (7) in favour of compositions in which 'the build up to the crime occupies over half the book [and the] journey [is.] often more interesting than the destination' (Coward and Semple 50–51). Christie, Marsh and Allingham

stick particularly closely to the schematic generic golden-age model, and Marsh's novels are particularly formulaic. They begin by introducing the main characters, establish their relationships with each other and possible motives for murder. Following this, the murder is committed, the detective and police arrive and interview the witness-suspects, evidence is pieced together with the aid of extended written notes, sometimes compiled by the assistant, usually Bathgate, the murder scene is reconstructed and the villain revealed. The exception to this construction is one romantic-digression, 'Interlude for Love', which focalises Alleyn and Troy's love relationship in *Death in a White Tie* (257), but even here, by keeping romance to a discrete chapter separate from the masculine sleuthing plot, Marsh's formal structure remains relatively intact. Dane and Simpson work with looser formulations and their deconstructions of the schematic detective model were recognised at the point of publication by reviewers and critics. The *Times Literary Supplement* noted that *Enter Sir John* was 'but incidentally a detective story' ('Enter' 182) and in *Murder for Pleasure*, Haycraft closes his chapter on golden-age detective fiction by remarking, 'several anticipatory references have been made to the "marriage" of the detective story and the novel of character, destined to be the most significant trend in the genre in the 1930s. One of the earliest works definitely to forecast this fusion was *Enter Sir John*' (158).

Pre-dating their female contemporaries, Dane and Simpson were the first to begin a series of texts whose nexus was the developing romantic relationship between the sleuth and his love interest.¹³ They perhaps influenced Marsh, Allingham and Sayers in this regard, especially given *Enter Sir John*'s similitude to *Strong Poison*'s narrative focus two years later on a detective becoming acquainted with his future spouse while in the process of proving her innocence after she is wrongly convicted of murder. Like Wimsey, Saumarez is motivated to clear Martella's name not by an impartial wish to see justice done, but by his personal feelings towards her. She is Dane's classic second-generation New Woman actress, with a brand of modern independence differentiated both from phallogocentric constructions of womanhood and the carelessness of generic 'moderns'. Ambitious, dignified in her genteel poverty, compassionate towards the sufferings of people and animals, imaginative, intuitive and guileless, she is a 'gently bred, self-controlled, courageous woman' (*Enter* 84), behaves with old-fashioned grace, dignity and reserve, and in this respect is a beacon of pre-war modes of virtuous behaviour. Yet this is mitigated by her modernity; she treats her thespian friends to informal cheap suppers in her tiny flat, is in possession of a modern candidness, has a penchant for drinking stout and her conversation is dotted with modern slang terms such as 'spread' for food, 'badgered' for intimidated (78), 'flared' for losing her temper (82). She embodies a new type of modern detective heroine, in the dock for a murder she hasn't committed two years before Sayers created a similar scenario in *Strong Poison*, wherein Vane 'pits

modern values against the Victorian thinking of the judge' using 'standards of honesty and integrity' (Young 45). Martella's defence lawyer is puzzled by her multiplicity, her behaviour in court which appears 'childish, flippant, dignified occasionally when it was least expected of her; and quite frequently rude' (*Enter* 82), and he appeals to the jury's sense of sympathy by referring to the best of the old and new, combined in the 'well-balanced [. . .] discipline bred in her' by her soldier-father, and her paradoxical 'educated' modernity and 'frankness and courage' which prevails even under the mental strain 'from working too hard' (85). She crosses twin thresholds, traversing between domestic and private world to court-room dock and theatre stage and in both she performs in full view of the public. She combines her two major enthusiasms, New Woman values and acting, which as liberal-thinking actress herself, Simpson likely shared. Establishing a professional role for herself, Martella 'had gone into the world to make her own living [. . .] chose her profession, earned a footing in it, worked hard and was kind' (84) and her industrious professionalism and life-time passion and gift for playing Shakespeare connects her with her literary predecessors, Damaris, Donna and Elinor. She is convicted predominantly on the grounds of her profession, 'never a very desirable occupation for a woman in English literature' (Grella 42), and the novel subjects prejudices against actresses to a rigorous critique, a critique which extends to people's preconceptions of religious minorities and the legal system. Martella is condemned on two counts: swayed by the prosecuting lawyer's counsel to remember 'she was an actress, and a very accomplished one; that she was cool in stage emergencies' (89), one of the jurors hysterically declares, 'by God, act she does!', and he is equally adamant that 'you can't trust these Roman Catholics [. . .] they all hang together. Besides, there's nothing in their religion against telling lies' (101–2). Although Martella has a more minor function in *Re-enter Sir John*, she is never reduced to the shadowy stereotyped wife of the majority of female-authored detective novels, Fitton, Troy and Sayers included, 'dimly seen as part of [the] serious detective novel's furniture [who] attract neither interest nor attention' (Mann 108). The novel counters normative associations of intuition with feminine inferiority; in her this quality is a valuable component of the husband–wife sleuthing partnership which over-rides the masculine logic of her husband, who relies on her insights to generate lines of enquiry and direct the investigation. Her instinctive understanding of Peter's character, for instance, rights her husband's faulty assessment:

'You know perfectly well that Peter's a wronged innocent.'

'I know nothing of the kind.'

'You don't know anything, I believe,' said his wife. But she failed to annoy him.

(*Re-Enter* 176)

Printer's Devil is even more transgressive of the structural and ideological boundaries of the genre than *Enter Sir John*, and anticipates feminist detective novels of the 1980s in which 'the crime and its solution became increasingly a convenient framework' (Munt 7). Defying narrow masculinist parameters, formulaic rigidity is substituted by a social commentary on women's anxieties and preoccupations and their careers rather than or as well as their marriages. Completely deconstructing Knox's model of the authoritarian masculine valorising sleuth, 'the establishment figure competently sorting out the crime' (Coward and Semple 51), the novel anticipates Barbara Vine's detective fiction written thirty-five years later in which there is no central detective but a 'detecting consciousness' comprised of an 'intimate circle' of onlookers (Rowland 48). Saumarez takes a back seat in the text; narratively insignificant, he is a secondary character, just one of Horrie's many friends and dinner guests, and his part in the hunt for her killer is confined to his participation in the final chase. The astute detective, Savory, is absent from the majority of the chapters too, and he never achieves the credibility and importance of the generic sleuth. In place of one truth-bearing character, there are four leads: Savory, Horrie, Gilda Bedenham – Horrie's young secretary and the illegitimate daughter from a brief union between one of Horrie's deceased female friends and Marmion Poole – and Koko Fry – Horrie's publicity manager and Gilda's husband by the end of the narrative. This multifarious text divides the narrative interest to create a multiple-perspectivising egalitarian tale and broadens the golden-age genre by taking it in a more contemporary generic direction. Hybridising several forms, it begins as a romantic comedy, transmutes into tragedy with Horrie's murder a third of the way through, and only evolves into a detective story when her death becomes suspicious towards the end of the narrative. By these means, the crime narrative is superseded by the stories of Horrie and Gilda, and their negotiations with modern womanhood as single women.

Despite the fact that 'a strong drive towards self-assertion on the part of the spinster' was a mark of inter-war feminist fiction (Joannou 78), in female-authored golden-age writing, the active single woman, and the older woman especially, was portrayed negatively, as a 'particular object of suspicion' (Rowland 161). Mitchell's representation of Mrs Bradley is culturally ambivalent and besides a few minor protagonists portrayed as sympathetic working *seule dames* such as Celia Brown-Jenkins in *The Longer Bodies* (47), her admiration for single women is limited. She most clearly disassociates herself from Amaris, a bohemian lesbian artist reminiscent of Geraldine Manning whose masculine lesbianism is similarly disavowed in *Dusty Answer*. 'Large, clever, ugly', with a 'prize fighter's jowl'; when she first appears she 'sauntered in, both hands in the pockets of her knitted suit, large walking shoes on her feet, and a cap of close cropped black hair crowning her well-poised head' (62). She is

considered by reliable characters to be a 'freak' (47) and her overt masculinity and physical repulsiveness combined with her role as murderer's accomplice serve to conflate deviant sexuality with criminality and she is conveniently expelled from the plot, fleeing to America to escape justice at the end of the novel. Single women penned by Marsh and Sayers are often motivated to delinquency and law-breaking by their hysterical sexuality and many of Allingham's spinsters are denigrated as distasteful witches involved in occult activities. With the exception of Marple, Dane and Simpson's sympathetic and complex middle-aged and professional single woman, Horrie, is the only character in golden-age writing to defy normative ideological constructions of spinsterhood, to the verification of her authors' feminist credentials. With the exception of Vane's writing and Troy's artistic dabbings, professional women protagonists in the genre were scarce, reflecting an inter-war world in which a secretary 'was the highest position a female could aspire to in the world of industry and commerce' (Jackson 120). Horrie, on the other hand, is startlingly 'London's first and only woman publisher' (*Printer's* 189). This enormous achievement is foregrounded through the narrative inclusion of a letter deposited with her will, which posthumously reveals her self-pride: 'I am the first woman to build up, out of nothing, a publishing house in London, I have had no money backers; I have depended on nobody for my policy; I have worked very hard and worked alone, and I have made something solid' (209–10). She cultivates an alternative domestic milieu centred on her office, combining power with care there, helping, counselling and supporting friends, clients and employees. Dane's admiration for this unconventional female management model can be inferred from the obituary which she wrote for a real professional woman, her principal publishing agent, Nancy Pearn, who also acted on behalf of Vera Brittain and Winifred Holtby. Pearn 'exercised considerable influence on the literary affairs of her time' Dane wrote, and 'with this professional flair and business knowledge went a most moving capacity for faithful and zealous friendship. Her world was her office: but of that office she made a home where anyone with the least claim on her, or with no claim at all, was welcomed, helped, and heartened' ('Miss Nancy Pearn' 8).

The *Times Literary Supplement* recognised a transgressive narrative strategy practised by Dane and Simpson – to 'choose their most forceful, triumphant character as the victim of murder' ('Printer's' 577). Their innovative generic shift deconstructs the comic moral code of detective fiction which requires that the mood be kept light by only punishing the deserving, in which:

because only unlikeable characters are made to suffer permanently in comedy, pains are taken to make the victim worthy of his fate: he must be an exceptionally murderable man [or] on the rare occasions when a young woman is murdered, she is always revealed a secret

sinner under a respectable façade. [. . .] Virtually all victims [. . .] suffer their violent expulsion because of some breach of the unwritten social or ethical code.

(Grella 41–42)

Breaking apart the status quo whereby female murder victims in particular are dismissed as culpable, unimportant stereotypes and ‘the single woman is often punished for exhibiting excessive or inappropriate desire’, *Printer’s Devil* establishes Horrie as a blueprint for the benevolent woman professional, chaste and respectable, deconstructs the literary convention that ‘we don’t particularly care what happens to [. . .] victims’ (Light 71), and designs her murder to be taken very seriously. As one reviewer pointed out at the time, the main focus of the narrative is the ‘tragedy of Horrie’s death’ (*Printer’s*, n.p.) and she is neither a ‘murderable man’ nor a young woman. Furthermore, she is a major character of high moral integrity as the *Times Literary Supplement* recognised, suggesting her death was a departure from convention because it ‘does not lessen her importance in the slightest, the importance attached to an animate being, not that associated with a corpse’ (*Printer’s* 577). *Re-enter Sir John* departs from tradition in its treatment of Sir John’s emotional response to the death of Mrs Lake; *Printer’s Devil* goes one step further to create a murder victim who elicits greater sympathy from characters and readers than was customary and whose death generates widespread grief and shock that reverberate right to the close of the text.

The *Times Literary Supplement* also note that Horrie’s position as only ‘seemingly secure’ (*Printer’s* 577) is also taken seriously in a novel which condemns male egoism and the vulnerability of single women under threat from masculine violence. Allingham and Marsh are among those writers known to ‘comment upon the affectations of near-artists or the pretensions of the theatrical’ in their detective writing (Symons 123–4); Dane and Simpson’s critique of arty poseurs manifested in their delineation of Horrie’s dangerous antagonist as yet has been unacknowledged. Poole is defined by outmoded poetry and solipsist and histrionic performances, the antithesis of Horrie’s benevolent community spirit and sense of humanity, which cause her to keep his defamatory memoirs away from the public to protect reputations as an act of friendship to him and others that might be hurt by what he has written, which goes unappreciated. Opposing his masculine highbrowism with her feminine middlebrow pragmatic understanding that the public ‘liked its daily bread to be daily bread’ (59) has wider feminist significance. His egoism poses a threat to women’s writing and were Horrie not to have bequeathed her business to Gilda, his villainous act would have opened the doors for other men to force their patriarchal highbrow aestheticism, decimate the warm feminine middlebrow style of literary sensibility which Horrie injects into her business, silence the feminine voice of the publishing

industry and destroy a female dynasty in the process. Female inheritance is as important a trope in *Printer's Devil* as it is in *Legend* and *The Babyons*. In her farewell letter, Horrie explains how 'the business, which now, as I write, is among the first three in England, has been a child to me. I have given the best of my strength to it. I want it to go on. And to go on, if possible, under the leadership of another woman' (210). Making Gilda her legatee provides the younger woman with a vital opportunity to take up the banner, carry on Horrie's work, keep her memory and methods alive, and bring feminine altruism and intuition into the masculine-dominated publishing industry and also ensures Horrie's continued presence and influence in the narrative beyond death.

In a cultural context which often damned the original New Woman spinster as 'the enemy of the "liberated" woman of the 1920s – the flapper' (Smith-Rosenberg, qtd. Young 41), Dane and Simpson create a positive inter-generational relationship between Horrie and Gilda, showing that young women can gain and learn from older ones. Sayers uses the same strategy in *Strong Poison*, 'to reconcile the generations of New Women' (Young 41) by dramatising older-New Woman Alexandra Climpson's supportiveness towards a beleaguered young Vane and helping Wimsey to solve the murder for which she has been wrongly convicted (45). The theme continues in *Gaudy Night*, when Vane literally steps into the academic shoes of older New-Woman role model, Miss de Vine, in order to catch her persecutor, enabling a 'utopic vision of women of different generations uniting to help one another' (46). While Sayers' texts only tentatively suggest a connection between young and older women, however, in *Printer's Devil*, female lineage is the principal theme, literal and reified through a decidedly tangible bequest. Gilda patently owes her freedoms to 'the victories won by earlier cohorts of New Women in professional and educational areas [which] had made their androgynous world possible' (Smith-Rosenberg, qtd. Young 45). Mitchell also dramatises an older spinster endowing a young woman with wealth in *The Longer Bodies* but this is a minor plot event. Starting by abiding by the normative process of patrilineal inheritance, Lady Puddequet bequeaths a paltry one hundred pounds each to her nieces and her huge fortune is kept for whichever of her nephews can prove their masculine worth by winning her athletics competition. As the plot unfolds, a binary between the physical and mental inadequacy of the boys and the self-sufficiency and independence of the girls becomes apparent and Puddequet modernises her outlook in line with the novel's perspective, vowing to 'probably leave my money to one of the girls' because 'the world will be a woman's world in another twenty years or so' (193). Horrie's bequest is more of a major narrative event and more profoundly augments an epoch of female economic independence. Where Dane's hands were tied in *The Scoop*, in *Printer's Devil*, she is free to create an older woman able to provide her young heroine with

the means to continue her good work and achieve the kind of voice and place which were denied to Beryl.

Horrie voices the positive changes occurring in women's economic lives since the Victorian and Edwardian period, that 'life had been harder for single women – plain, penniless and devouringly ambitious – when Horrie Pedlar was a girl, than her trim young clerks – with their good wages, neat tunics, latch keys, and liberty – would ever have the imagination to conceive' (*Printer's* 31). Indeed, despite her realisation of New Women aspirations, 'to be autonomous and powerful individuals, to enter the world as if they were men' (Smith – Rosenberg, qtd. Young 42), she is not without a sense of self-division. In its nuanced representation of an aging New Woman, the novel intimates that it is not easy to reject fin-de-siècle and early-twentieth-century models of female identity, to become liberated 'completely from consideration of gender' (ibid.), as Smith-Rosenberg suggests. Horrie is historically, culturally and painfully bound to femininity, 'a publisher of note, but also a woman', engaged in 'lifelong struggles with fashion [which] had left her sore' (*Printer's* 8). She declines an invitation to speak at a public dinner celebrating the anniversary of the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* because she is embarrassed about her poor fashion sense. Her impression that the next generation are enjoying much greater autonomy than she is faulty, however. Participation in the public world is still difficult for young women in the 1930s it would seem; in the opening chapters of the novel, Gilda's is restricted by poverty and feelings of insignificance. Lacking the confidence to enter public life under her own steam and find her own voice she complains to Koko that she believes herself 'unsuitable', that she doesn't 'suit anything or anyone' (173, 97). Yet although she needs a fairy-tale bequest to alleviate her economic hardship and cultural anxieties, she does have an embryonic self-belief, she feels 'I've something to say in my own way, if I could only learn how to say it' (97) and her modern world certainly contains emancipating possibilities. Self-defining, intellectual, university educated, she works and lives like Jill, Beryl and Martella, in a state of relative independence between Chelsea and the Embankment, most likely in one of the ubiquitous 'multi-occupied small terrace[s] [which] remained the typical, urban residence in the industrial and riverside boroughs' (Alexander 312).

Horrie and Gilda's very different fates in their London residences symbolise a cultural transition in process. In figurative terms, Horrie pays the ultimate price for her independence, while Gilda is representative of a more modern invulnerability, symbolised through literal as well as professional liminality, in 'freedom of movement, [one of the] important themes throughout the interwar period' (Tinkler and Krasnick 129). Although both women cross thresholds from the private to the public sphere, Horrie is generally confined to inside spaces, her office and her home, where she is fundamentally unsafe and murdered. At a time when

modern women were beginning to recognise that they had a right to travel, however, like Beryl and Jill, Gilda journeys across and through greater physical space, outside into the world of the city. Women's mobility is a theme also in Mitchell's work, albeit a minor one. In *The Longer Bodies*, marginal character, Myra Caddick excuses Lady Puddequet her Edwardian values on account of the fact that 'she has not had the freedom that we modern people have acquired' (136) and speed affords her a self-defining moment of semiotic jouissance. Mounting a motor cycle for the first time, 'a sudden glorious madness filled [. . .] the soul. [. . .] She burst into glad, full-throated song, and opened the throttle wide' (294). Control of the machine and access to speedy movement enables the growth of her identity beyond her role of paid companion, and after this episode she is referred to in the narrative by her first name. Women's mobility is foregrounded as a much more important trope in the Saumarez trilogy as a whole, and in *Printer's Devil* in particular, and a particular marker of liberation is the bus journey. Before the war, this particular mode of travel in life and literature was a perilous business for women. One woman remembered how her brother 'caught me just as I was boarding a bus and soundly walloped me, as to him and to my father it was almost improper for a young lady to be alone by herself in the streets' (Jackson 122) and George Gissing's Monica Madden, believing 'the ride in an omnibus would perhaps make her head clearer' (26), is thwarted when it is on the bus that she is approached by an undesirable male suitor and travel cannot protect her from the perpetual surveillance of men. Yet by the inter-war period, women 'made three times as many journeys a week on public transport's comfortable new seats as [they] had done forty years ago' (Alexander 313), and a significant amount of narrative space is allocated to Gilda's excursions enjoyed on this modern form of transport. When she is not on the bus, she is walking, and this is the era when perambulating the metropolis and frequenting its parks had become another predominantly female activity (ibid.). Madden's London peregrinations make her prey to a man to whom she eventually becomes unhappily married, but in the modern context of *Printer's Devil* urban wanderings of the kind which Beryl enjoyed in *The Scoop* are celebrated with great fervour. The contemporary city is a beautiful and exciting domain where Gilda feels she is 'my own mistress' (22) and she roams unconfined, day and night, through a London which has now disappeared, an evocation of Dane's own metropolitan world in idyllic terms, a vibrant and colourful space where 'the streets between Soho and Covent Garden – dominated by the fruit and flower market – were filled with small workshops making buttons, sequins, underwear, jewellery, artificial flowers, waistcoats, theatrical costumes, scenery and make-up and the multitude of trades surviving theatre-land and the cinema industry' (Alexander 303), where 'buses thundered, taxis lingered, sparrows darted, flower-sellers called: all glamorous, all spangled with rain'

(Printer's 245). While Beryl searches out specific locations dictated by her detective role, Gilda's more aimless meandering exemplifies what Parsons calls the modern female 'search not for place but for self or identity [. . .] in uncertain environment[s] of modernity [a] pilgrimage [which] combines walking over ground and personal fulfilment' (41). She is fully conscious of the new privileges afforded her by liminal mobility; after parting company with Koko in the city centre following one of their dates, she reflects on his paternalism, how 'where his women-folk were concerned, he was proudly preparing to revert to the strictest Victorianism, and would have been horrified had he learned that she proposed to continue the perambulation of Chelsea without his escort' (172). She is perfectly confident in her power to contest his will on this matter.

Gilda is as enthusiastic as Elinor about the modern world, holding fast to her traditional behavioural and moral code while absorbing informalities, and permitting Koko to temper her outmoded tastes. She is an accomplished classical pianist with an intellectual appreciation of 'high' culture and of the music of Bach and Stravinsky in particular, but after Koko introduces her to bohemian restaurants, musical comedy and popular jazz tunes, she starts to fuse modern jazz rhythms and classical harmonies in fox-trot style 'negro spiritual' influenced syncopated piano arrangements (Printer's 159) and her companionate marriage is a successful hybrid of old-fashioned and modern values, mirrored in her vibrant new musical compositions, epitomising Dane's vision of combining the best of the old and the best of the new. Her husband is a modern construct in relation to more than his musical preferences. The antithesis of the traditional upper-class patriarchal hero, he makes good in spite of his working-class origins, which remain audibly present in his London dialect learned from his cockney mother who called him 'dearie' and pulled him up for 'jaw', 'lip' or 'cheek' (121), and challenging female golden-age writers who dismiss working class characters as insignificant, often criminal and always figures of fun, Dane and Simpson dignify Koko and he is represented as a fit mate for Gilda. His social marginalisation extends beyond his class. An effeminate, evidenced when the murderer is revealed to be his father-in-law and 'hysteria had him in his grip. He turned, to collapse crowing and sobbing across the low parapet' (303), he is also, like Gilda, illegitimate, and this emotionally connects them.

By claiming that 'that admirable comedy, the falling in love of Koko Fry', supplants Horrie's tragedy as the predominately important plot line in the second half of the novel ('Printer's' 577), *The Times Literary Supplement* recognise and validate Koko as lover more than hero, indicating Dane and Simpson's successful creation of a popular yet feminised male protagonist. However, by omitting to mention Gilda at all in their review, they ignore the fact that it is actually Gilda who takes centre stage, and Koko is little more than a narrative satellite, pivoting round her in a subversive reversal of the pattern of gender power relations at

work in normative detection plots. In contrast to her husband, she is consistently controlled and capable. After the shock of Horrie's bequest has worn off, she 'showed no signs of importing any further emotion whatever into business' and Koko and Savory 'marvelled at her decisive calm' (219). Koko is full of admiration and confidence in her abilities, and when she embraces her new position with fortitude and professionalism, he describes it as 'just the sort of job I've always said you could do on your head' (214). Even Marmion goes some way towards redeeming himself with his proud recognition that 'my daughter [. . .] is a great woman!' (240) at 'the beginning of a reign' (218). Landed with an all-consuming and decidedly modern workload, when Gilda becomes 'ruefully aware, there were far fewer un-business hours than for her premises' (305), Koko is accepting and uncomplaining and takes a back seat in order to support her career, which he cheerfully acknowledges is more economically viable and of greater public importance than his own aspirations to write. Unlike the architects of Vane and Wimsey, Fitton and Campion, and Tommy and Tuppence, Dane and Simpson reverse the traditional pattern whereby following the marriage vows, the 'feminised "masochistic" modern male must return to a paradigm of dominant, aggressive masculinity and the modern female must return to a traditionally submissive role in order to establish a successful romantic relationship' (Hoffman 8–9). Unlike Allingham, whose sole career-woman novel, *The Fashion in Shrouds* (1938) is 'fraught with problematic conflict between active ideal and the domesticity that was still considered ultimate feminine achievement' (Hoffman 9), they exhibit no anxiety about making this progressive narrative shift. Gilda exceeds any low expectations held by the real modern woman by virtue of her new professional status and the esteem in which her career is held by both her father and her husband, and rewarding her with marriage *and* work is an optimistic departure from the norm, signalling Dane and Simpson's contention that women should and perhaps now can have both. In her discussion of female-authored detective fiction, Mann contends that 'there must be a good deal of straight wish-fulfilment when a full-time woman writer has the professional women in her books treated with a deference, with an acceptance of the objective value of their work, which can rarely be quite part of her own everyday life' (105) and Gilda's triumph is perhaps an exaggeration of the true conditions of working wives at the time. This representation of a successful central protagonist can be construed as a progressive challenge to the cultural hegemony and a record of a palpable change, however. Dane and Simpson see glimpses of hope which they are committed to share with their readership. This impetus is reflected in all of Dane's aspirational feminist plots; Horrie and Elinor are fictitious examples of the widely respected professional woman who did exist in inter-war London, perhaps fantasised into top-performing London actresses and publishers.

Simpson was not to work with Dane again, although she continued to work on Detection Club collaborations with Sayers, who incidentally dedicated *Busman's Honeymoon* to her (Gorman and Matter 54), and these two writers supported each other's work in a correspondence which probably lasted until Simpson's tragic death in 1940.¹⁴ Dane's final piece of detective writing was a feminist chapter in the collaborative 1931 novel, *The Floating Admiral*. Set in a pseudo-feudal English riverside village, the stereotypical golden-age location does not sit well with Dane's interest in the cosmopolitan London world of theatres, newspapers and publishing companies, and as her contribution to the story does not come until the penultimate chapter, she is prevented from eschewing the traditional paraphernalia of clues, alibis and timetables in favour of a properly embedded feminist agenda of the kind which distinguished the Saumarez trilogy from detective novels by most other writers. Perhaps this accounts for the fact that her chapter is very short, somewhat lack lustre, and although she introduces a female lead character, she makes little effort to move the investigation towards a resolution, contributing merely a rather peculiar clue related to greengages. This is not helpful to Antony Berkeley's task, which his aptly titled final chapter 'Clearing up the Mess', suggests is an onerous one (202). Barrow gives as the reason for the end of Dane's detective writing career the fact that 'in 1932 America discovered Winifred and swallowed her up for a time' (61), but her failure to inject feminism into the trite structure of *The Floating Admiral* suggests that she was perhaps growing a little tired of the genre.

Marsh, Allingham and even Christie and Sayers are largely conservative in their treatments of gender role and power. Although Marple has agency, intellect, integrity and geographical mobility, Christie is more preoccupied with designing clever plots and puzzles than creating a role model for inter-war female readers, and Tuppence, like Vane, Fitton and Troy are closed down through marriage. Mitchell's novels are certainly more progressive in relation to their feminist representation of Mrs Bradley but this position is somewhat weakened by the fact that Bradley is a somewhat crude New Woman caricature, characterised by negativity, coldness, detachment, lack of reflection, proclivity for violence and cruelty, limited sense of humanity or moral purpose and idiosyncratic moral standards (O'Brien 67). Dane and Simpson more successfully outmanoeuvre the rigid structures and rules of the patriarchal detective genre and interrogate the conservative inter-war ideology which these structures reinforce. They resist venerating their male sleuths, incorporate plots and themes which eclipse the investigative narrative, reject the sterility of technical ingenuity and transcend the non-progressive plots of generic female-authored golden-age texts which are guilty of 'displaying with their resolutions an emphasis on domesticity and on maintaining a heteronormative order' (Hoffman 2). As with all of Dane's work, however,

it is important to note the ways in which in her detective fiction the feminist ethos is occasionally contradicted and complicated by slightly conservative textual elements. Martella's womanliness is a particularly vexed issue; after her marriage, her theatre work is barely mentioned and she only appears in a domestic context. Furthermore, romantic resolutions in the Saumarez trilogy seem odd in the light of the fact that love plots were traditionally avoided by the detective genre and Dane rejected such closures in her autobiographical, realist, gothic and saga fiction, where they would have been deemed more appropriate by the reading public. Simpson's influence may have been a factor in this, but romantic conclusions are also likely to have been the inevitable consequence of bringing issues of female identity into a genre which more than other forms demanded a light sociological touch, little gender trouble and a clear restoration of the status quo in the finale. Moreover, any conservatism thrown up by the texts' romantic conclusions is mitigated by the will to show happy marriages as companionable, with women in control. Indeed, in a period which was widely held as 'a time of antifeminism' (Klein 97) when in literature and 'in life, women's work was seen as provisional – not part of her life's commitment or her self-definition' (Haskell, qtd. In Klein 99), Horrie and Gilda's configured identities are the fruit of their work as much as, or even instead of, marriage. Furthermore, in contrast to the childlessness-related anxieties of the protagonists of 'Spinsters' Rest' and *The Lover*, ten years later into Dane's career children are not a consideration for her characters. Also, Gilda's feminist act of hanging Horrie's portrait on her office wall as a source of constant inspiration, an irascible reminder of the validity of working spinsters echoes the choice made by Isabella and Jenny to put Harriot and Madala's pictures on display. Women in Dane's work re-interpret, cherish, display, or creatively adapt images of women of the past in decisive final narrative statements of the importance of female lineage, gender-power transference and women's careers. Dane and Simpson's positive delineations of women, intuitive, mobile and increasingly confident in their professional and personal lives and alternative domestic arrangements, serve to call into question Klein's argument that all female-authored detection fiction in this period did no more than 'submerge and then restore the acceptable story – the traditional woman's script – and sink the unacceptable, more radical presentation of a woman professional' (103), proving their feminist integrity.

Notes

1. These sentiments are reiterated in *The Morning Post's* admiration of the novel's 'clever characterisation and brilliant dialogue all very lifelike' (Preface. *Re-Enter* n.p.) and the *Daily Express's* eagerness to 'commend it to all those who like detective stories' (ibid.).
2. Marsh and Tey were never members.

3. Hoffman claims that 'Golden age women writers are tacitly if not always polemically committed to the political and social advances for women, or at least middle-class women, by which they are also enabled' (147). In relation to Sayers, Christie, Marsh and Allingham in particular, Rowland observes how despite their 'unease with the concept of women *in power*' (164), their work is critical of women under arbitrary power and they use the genre 'to disrupt the ways in which femininity and masculinity have been previously constructed as mutually exclusive and mutually constitutive [with the] masculine assuming culturally desirable qualities of reason, intelligence, objectivity, judgment, action and heroism, leaving the feminine, by structural definition to signify irrationality, foolishness, subjectivity, passivity and the need for masculine guidance' (16). Plain especially praises Christie's novels wherein 'young and old, married, single or widowed, mother or career girls – [. . .] women have their own agendas and are assumed to be responsible for their own actions' (47). Sally Munt notes the ways in which 'on the way' towards their ideological conclusions, female-authored novels 'could offer a different, deconstructive reading' of cultural norms (29), laying the foundations for 'the more overt feminist crime novel of the 1980s' (7–8). Rosalind Coward and Linda Semple find examples 'inclined towards potentially radical areas of investigation [which] took issues that were of paramount importance to women in those periods and turned them into the subject of the crime novels' (47). Laurel Young, Margaret Kinsman and Alison Light also observe a tendency for female authors to construct modern, companionable, equitable marriages and to make liberal feminist identifications with fellow others.
4. In 'Dorothy L. Sayers and the New Woman Detective Novel' (2005), Laurel Young categorises writing which she terms second generation new womanist, a cultural form developed by authors like Dane: 'educational bourgeois women who came to political and creative maturity in the 1910s and 1920s' (Smith-Rosenberg, qtd. in Young 45).
5. Namely Rowland (71) and Heather Worthington (117).
6. In *A Man Lay Dead* (168), *Death in a White Tie* (266) and *Death and the Dancing Footman* (556), Alleyn orchestrates, Saumarez-style, a theatrical reenactment of the murder in order to reveal the culprit's identity to his audience of witnesses, suspects and villain. His passion for the theatre reflects Marsh's own interest, which was cultivated through her involvement as a manager and director with various New Zealand stage companies.
7. Rowland's point is reiterated by Megan Hoffman (92).
8. It is interesting that Alleyn likes to sing in French, too, and this similarly signifies his elevated social and cultural status (*Artists in Crime* 685).
9. Except in the studies of Hoffman (2016), O'Brien (2017) and Peppis (2017).
10. According to Jackson, female contributions to the profession in the 1920s and 1930s were restricted to work undertaken by very few women for private-investigation companies as 'observers, correspondents, decoys in "rigged" divorce cases [and] store detectives' (112–114) and as late as 1961 women comprised just three percent of the Association of British detectives, the only professional detective organisation. Women were able to join the police force but only in minor roles 'relating to welfare and preventative work with children and young girls' (117). In 1928 there were just fifty women PCs in London and eighty women with powers of arrest. This was an issue debated by active feminists. In 1928 *The Vote* reported a 'strong demand for the provision of more policewomen . . . made by chief inspector Champneys [woman], of the Women's Auxiliary Service, at a meeting of members

of the . . . Newbury branch of the Women's Freedom League'. Champneys pointed out that 'the WAS [. . .] rendered much useful service during the General Strike' and complained that despite this 'the government refused to pay for [. . .] training and the WAS had to exist on voluntary subscriptions' (*The Vote* 6 April 1928).

11. According to Parsons, this was generally a modern female-authored literary trope. Certainly pro-feminist George Gissing dramatises this new practice in *The Odd Woman*, in which on Sundays, one of his young single females, over-worked shop worker, Monica Madden, 'liked to spend a part of the day in free wandering about London' (25). Yet first-generation New Women writers more likely located characters more in Victorian drawing rooms as 'perhaps they felt urban space restraining' and middle-class women on the street seemed alarmingly self-reliant to the 'bourgeois [. . .] male writer' (Parsons 83) Amy Levy was 'one of the first women writers to adopt the perspective of city observer / flaneur' (87) and 'London pervades [her] writing as a place of support and nurture that she is at home with' (88). In her 'The Romance of a Shop' (1880) her central female protagonist is 'fascinated' by the city, gripped with a 'passion' for contemplating it and celebrates the 'pulses' of city 'as they beat and throb' (87). Parsons argues that Woolf and Richardson later 'emphasise the tangible and walkable (London) metropolis' (ibid.) and through her characters, Dane develops this emerging literary tradition.
12. Alleyne and Troy value intuition too. In *A Man Lay Dead* Alleyne states: 'even though a Yard official is supposed to have no psyche, I find there is often a moment in a case when a piece of one's mind, one's feeling, one's sense, knows the end while all the rest of the trained brain cuts this intuitive bit dead' (159). He is proud of what he calls his 'hunch', which which Fox calls imagination, and during the investigation in *Nursing Home Murder* he declares: 'the weird is upon me now, if that's the expression' (589–90). This intuition is gendered feminine. Troy states: 'I suppose woman's instinct is the sort of phrase you particularly abominate,' to which he replies, 'that depends a little on the woman. . . . I can see that this time the woman's instinct was not at fault' (695).
13. These comprise *Enter Sir John, Printer's Devil* and *Re-enter Sir John* by Dane and Simpson, *Strong Poison*, (1929), *Have His Carcase* (1932), *Gaudy Night* (1936) and *Busman's Honeymoon* (1937), by Sayers, *A Man lay Dead*, *Artists in Crime*, (1938), *The Nursing Home Murder* and *Death and the Dancing Footman*, by Marsh and *Sweet Danger*, *Traitor's Purse* and *Coroner's Pigeon* by Allingham.
14. See Sayers, *The Letters* 342, 359–60, 375–376, 386, 392, 395–6.

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Conclusion

Maurizio Ascari writes ‘when looking backwards we always interpret the development of a phenomenon in an instrumental way in order to highlight those aspects that correspond to our current needs and wishes – ideology and desire both being involved in this process’ (9). If Dane’s work is read from the vantage point which Ascari describes and a twenty-first-century perspective sought within her pages, she likely appears a little politically retrogressive. Her exceptional imaginative women mirror the ‘woman of genius’ in fin-de-siècle New Woman writings, but like these texts, which have been criticised as the ‘apotheosis of bourgeois individualism’, whose middle-class superiority works to ‘trouble feminist interpretation and commentary’ (Rachel du Plessis qtd.in Boumelha 174), they are perhaps, despite their feminism, guilty of helping to buoy up an unequal class system. The unstable nature of some of Dane’s narrative perspectives on class and indeed gender derives from a complex mixture of her liberalism and traditionalism, shaped by personal belief and New Feminist cultural internalisations: her middle-class respect for Englishness and Victorian values which she found conducive to her vision for the modern world and her arguably over-optimistic assumptions that achievements by and for women in the inter-war period were more far-reaching than perhaps they were. Yet her texts are perhaps best understood, to use a phrase of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s which Sally Munt appropriates in her assessment of female-authored (detective) fiction, as ‘kinda subversive and kinda hegemonic’ (Sedgwick, qtd. in Munt 29). Standing with one foot in the past and one in the future, if her fiction and drama slide back into conservatism and non-feminist thinking from time to time, this can also be explained in part to the conventions of some of the genres in which she was writing and also to the hegemonic demands and perspectives of readers and publishers, audiences and the commercial theatre industry. It is likely that her work was strategically packaged to preserve some of the traditional reassuring doctrines which her publishers and the more conformist element of her readership would expect while gently affirming and consolidating modern feminist values which her more progressive and receptive readers were likely to

share. Indeed, open to multiple interpretations, among a preponderance of intra- and inter-textual anomalies, her work can be praised for its defiant and empowering impulses and strong subversions corresponding with her personal indignation at injustice, intolerance and poverty and her huge faith in female potential and supremacy. *Regiment of Women* and *Legend* overtly privilege heterosexual romance over careerism and spinsterhood perhaps, but they can also be read as mourning the failure of their heroines' quests for autonomy and re-containment within rigidifying traditional domestic contexts following brief escapes into woods, fields and interludes of lesbian desire. 'Spinsters' Rest' equates women's happiness with having children but it also challenges prejudice against single women and champions single motherhood. *The Lover*, *The Baby-ions* and *Broome Stages* undoubtedly generate sympathy towards diminished patriarchs in ways which contemporary readers might consider excessively conciliatory, yet they portray masculinity as absurd and its proponents are ultimately firmly and satisfactorily subordinated in line with the narrative perspective. *Broome Stages* closes with the triumph of male primogeniture, yet the boy inheritors are effeminates, under the influence of a wise mother whose control over her life and career is the principal victory. *Wandering Star* is interpretable as an elegy about the death of a woman's romantic soul but this loss engenders greater rewards for the heroine: androgyny, creativity, freedom, wealth and power. The Saumarez trilogy might uphold the brilliant male detective and the institution of marriage but the power and professionalisation of women is once again the main thematic.

If the tendency to judge Dane's work from current feminist and post-feminist perspectives is resisted, and it is interpreted in the light of inter-war feminist ideologies operational in writings which mapped a slowly changing hegemony and spoke to women accustomed to acquiescence but starting to resist traditional role-expectations, its messages clearly correspond to and generally exceed the feminism of the work of many of her contemporaries. Provoking cultural norms, inflecting traditional forms and popular genres with modernist introspection, psychology and romantic disappointments, her texts celebrate transcendent rising women and men in decline. Written in the spirit of alternative domestic modernism, they create powerful prototypes for modern independent womanhood, exceptional, humanistic, imaginative, resourceful and ambitious. They become increasingly aligned with feminist principles in a diachronic progression which traces the gradual evacuation of heroines from patriarchal-dominated private spheres into empowering fantasy worlds and ultimately modern commercial environments. Feminine rite-of-passage narratives demonstrate a feminist impulse, and work to deconstruct patriarchal discourse using tropes of liminal transcendence to convey threshold transitions by which women evade and escape patriarchal marriages and traditional family formations. A personal and social process which has been

recognised in works by other female authors occurs whereby 'margin-ality and invisibility may be the consequences of undertaking the act of separation from a stable position' and 'being "in transit" inevitably entails the prospect of failure', but the risk can be worth it as 'transition may produce moments of creativity that freshen up the social order', and 'liminality may also bring about the sudden emerging of agency' (Turner, qtd in Gómez Reus and Gifford 6). Steering between conservatism and modernism to negotiate a strong feminist identity for her fiction which stands firm in spite of nods to tradition, Dane also challenges the grand patriarchal metanarrative in a broader sense and Gay Wachman's contention that Dane broke 'the rules of silence and propriety that muffled middle-class discourse – and above all, the discourse of women – about class, "race", gender and sexual differences' (3) is, in the main, entirely valid. She denounces war and territorialism, creates rewarding fictional friendships and romances that transcend social, racial and sexual divisions and acknowledges the social injustices that bring disadvantaged people to the gallows and marginalise racial, and homosexual minorities.

The feminist politics of her final major novels, historical fantasy *The Moon is Feminine*, (1938) and her swan song, *The Flower Girls* (1954) are visible in her expanded homosexual narrative threads. *The Moon is Feminine* extends the enlightened representation of male homosexuality inscribed in *Broome Stages*. A 'deeply queer' tale ('The Presents' n.p.) about an erotic triangulation featuring two men and one woman, it openly acknowledges the power and validity of homosexual desire, and its candid representation is likely influenced by Dane's place at the heart of a community of theatrical homosexuals and same-sex friends, as well as by the atmosphere of Brighton, where the novel is located, a long-standing homosexual meeting place which she regularly frequented. She regularly met up with Noel Coward there¹ and was well-acquainted with 'fellow Hoverite', Edward Thompson, who was later to become 'a mainstay of Brighton Gay Switchboard for many years' ('The Presents' n.p.). Again focussing explicitly on non-normative sexuality, centralising the vigorous and interesting covert lesbian, *The Flower Girls* writes back to *Regiment of Women* and *Legend*, rethinking some of Dane's more conservative Edwardian perspectives and neatly marking the culmination of her progressive gender-political writing career. This novel also connects thematically to *Wandering Stars*, stamping feminist authority on another tale of an actress-heroine's pragmatic and unromantic treatment of a love-struck male playwright suitor whose assumption that he can easily win the woman of his desire is confounded by the revelation of her driving ambition. It orchestrates fictional revenge against the abuser of Damaris's creative power when it transpires near the close of this later narrative that the central female protagonist is probably homosexual and has capitalised upon the suitor's presumption and manipulated him to write a great part for her which enables her to gain total

control over her stage roles and enhances her status as a theatrical celebrity. Like *Wandering Stars* and *Legend*, textual enigmas screen a feminist script which the discerning reader is invited to discover by reading against the impercipient of the character-narrator. In their open treatments of homosexuality, the outlooks of *The Moon is Feminine* and *The Flower Girls* develop the broad, liberal, tolerant perspectives on sexual orientation which inform Dane's other work. They continue her tradition of sexually non-normative and alternative domestic plots inscribed into her writings as a whole and reflect her own lack of interest in and experience of patriarchal marriage.

Dane's feminist plots, and her homosexual narratives in particular, reveal a New-Womanist halfway house, a gender-political philosophy bridging the feminisms of the early twentieth-century suffrage period and the 1960s and 1970s second-wave whose agendas they anticipate. They also have much in common with present-day feminist novels, according to Knepper's theory of contemporary post-feminist discourse which defines feminist texts as those which represent

as a norm and not as freaks, women capable of intelligence, moral responsibility, competence, and independent action [which] reveals the economic, social, political and psychological problems women face as part of a patriarchal society, [. . .] explores female consciousness and female perceptions of the world; [. . .] creates women who have psychological complexity and rejects sexist stereotypes.

(Knepper, qtd. Klein 201)

Characteristically concerned to speak to 'the women's side' at all costs, in her inter-war texts Dane connects New Woman writing and inter-war domestic modernism to later phases of feminist writing, journeying towards modern feminist consciousness in the process.

Note

1. They met at a hotel at number 11, Marine Parade, which became the setting of the hotel frequented by the novel's main protagonist. It is now called *The Amsterdam*.

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